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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE TRANSITION TO MOTHERHOOD

Occupational choices and family decisions in the life course of university-educated women

by

GILLIAN CHRISTINE RANSON ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Edmonton, Alberta
FALL, 1995

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE TRANSITION TO MOTHERHOOD: OCCUPATIONAL CHOICES AND FAMILY DECISIONS IN THE LIFE COURSE OF UNIVERSITY-EDUCATED WOMEN, submitted by GILLIAN CHRISTINE RANSON in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the relationship between occupational choice and the transition to motherhood among a group of women who graduated from the University of Alberta in 1985. Aggregate data from a larger study in which the women participated had shown clear occupational differences in the timing of motherhood, and, among women with children, in participation in paid employment after childbirth. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with 45 of the women, and shorter telephone interviews with 19 others, allowed the relationship to be explored interpretively.

The research was oriented by two theoretical perspectives. The life course approach, particularly as informed by Giddens' structuration theory, invited a view of motherhood as a significant transition in the life course, and of women as actors, constructing their own biographies in a social context of considerable constraint. Feminist theory suggested the centrality of motherhood, both as an ideological definition of "true" femininity, and of mothering as a set of socially constrained practices for which women are positioned to be responsible. Both theoretical perspectives raised the problem of theorizing a life course which bridges paid work and family work, or public and private domains.

The interview data suggested that, though career choice and work history had somewhat contradictory effects on the timing of the transition to motherhood, family decisions were clearly affected by workplace issues. In general, successful career establishment -- most easily achieved by the teachers in the sample -- appeared to be the most important prerequisite in the timing of the first pregnancy. In terms of employment decisions after childbirth, the possibility of maintaining an ongoing connection to the original occupation was much easier for women in traditional occupations, at least in part because they were readily able to convert to part-time work.

The data also generated a possible theoretical explanation for the strong commitment to motherhood as a career demonstrated by many of the women in the well-educated, predominantly middle-class sample. It was suggested that the possibility of choosing a pregnancy might increase women's feelings of responsibility, both for the initial decision to have a baby, and then for subsequent child care.

This research has implications for policy formulation in the areas of women's career choices, gender equity in the workplace, and work-family integration.

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The women whom I met were participants of the Youth Employment Study, which has been administered since 1985 by the Population Research Laboratory in the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta, under the direction of Dr. Harvey Krahn and Dr. Graham Lowe. We are collectively grateful to the study's many funders: Alberta Manpower, Alberta Education, Alberta Career Development and Employment, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the federal Solicitor General's Department, the City of Edmonton, and the University of Alberta's Central Research Fund. I owe a personal debt of gratitude to Dr. Krahn and Dr. Lowe for their willingness to share their data, and the resources they made available to me to allow me to use it. I also much appreciated the help of staff in the Population Research Laboratory, in particular David Odynak and Fran Russell. Tania Herbert's careful transcription of many interview tapes is also gratefully acknowledged.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction....................................1

Chapter 2: Backdrop: the social context..................9

- Demographic trends in fertility and women's employment......................10
- Public policy and the employment of women with children.....................26
- Women's work and ideologies of motherhood...........................33
- Women's employment choices after childbirth...........................41
- Summary...............................52

Chapter 3: Developing a theoretical approach.............56

- Theorizing the life course.............58
- Structuration theory and the life course...............................65
- Women, theory and life course research.............................69
- Women's and men's lives...............72
- Theorizing motherhood.................74
- Mothering and the life course..........84
- Summary and prospect..................86

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology..............91

- The Youth Employment Study.............91
- The dissertation research.............101

Chapter 5: Children -- by chance or choice.............125

- Unplanned pregnancies.................127
- "Semi-planned" pregnancies............129
- Planned pregnancies...................131

Chapter 6: Mothering and full-time paid work...........139

- The decision to work full-time........142
- Child care choices....................146
- Going back to work....................150
- The division of labour at home........153
- Career consequences...................159
- Work, family and ideologies of motherhood...........................163

Chapter 7: Mothering and part-time paid work............170

- The decision to work part-time........172
- The division of family work...........174
- Child care and ideologies of motherhood..........................177
- Why work?...........................180
- Working in the future................182

Chapter 8: Mothering and home-based work...............187

- The decision to be home-based.........190
- Considering the tradeoffs.............196
- The need to work......................198
- A day in the (family) life............205
- Social support........................208
- Husbands, support and family work.....213
- Employment in the future..............222

Chapter 9: Childless -- or childfree...................228

- "Childlessness" deconstructed.........231
- Voluntary childlessness...............233
- Involuntary childlessness.............255

Chapter 10: Discussion and conclusions..................270

- The workplace and the transition to motherhood..........................272
- Motherhood and paid work.............274
- Ideologies of motherhood and practices of mothering................282
- The reproduction of constraint........286
- Women as actors......................287
- Women and the "double life"..........290
- Real life and the future of "mothering"..........................296
- Conclusion...........................302

Bibliography...307

Appendix...330

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Attrition bias to 1989 94

Table 2: Presence of children by faculty of graduation (1992) 100

Table 3: Employment status by presence of children (1992) 100

Table 4: Employment status of women with children, by faculty of graduation (1992) 100

Table 5: Sampling frame for interview sample 104

Table 6: Family status of interview sample from 1992 information 107

Table 7: Family status of in-person interviews at interview date 107

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the transition to motherhood. In particular, it concerns the way motherhood is approached by a group of well-educated, middle-class women, some of whom have children already, some of whom will probably have children soon, a few of whom will probably never have children.

The women whose experiences are described at length in this study are a sub-sample of a larger group of 185 women graduates of the University of Alberta. This group was first surveyed in 1985, when their average age was 23. They were part of an ongoing panel study [1] which, between 1985 and 1992, generated a detailed record of their work experiences after graduation, and also their changing family circumstances.

The transition to motherhood has been one of a series of possible events in the unfolding lives of these women, whose collective experience has also included shifts from school to work, from work to unemployment, from single to "coupled" (and sometimes back to single). And while these individual transitions were experienced individually, not collectively, many of them took place in a shared social context. These women were launched from mainly middle-class homes through a common educational system; they lived (most of them) under the same political and economic system; they competed for jobs in the same labour markets; they read the same newspapers in the same cultural milieu. A tag for their collective experience could be something like "Well-Educated Women Coming of Age in Alberta." Hareven, interested in the cumulative effect of transitions through an entire life course, would describe them as "an age group moving through history" (Hareven, 1978:8). Mannheim might have considered them a "generation-unit," expecting to see "a certain affinity in the way in which all move with and are formed by their common experiences" (Mannheim, 1927/1972: 306).

---

[1] The Youth Employment Study was undertaken by the Population Research Laboratory in the University of Alberta department of sociology to examine the school-to-work transitions of a panel of university and high school graduates. More information about this study is provided in Chapter 4.

When they were first surveyed, as graduands in 1985, their major preoccupation was probably getting a job. But by the time of the last survey, in 1992, most of them were entering their 30s, and the question of motherhood was likely to be looming large. Certainly it was likely to have a critical effect on their lives. For women in general, the transition to motherhood means career interruptions (Burch, 1985; Robinson, 1986), downward occupational mobility (Dex, 1986; Li and Currie, 1992), and ultimate responsibility for child care, no matter what their paid employment status (Marshall, 1993; Duffy, Mandell and Pupo, 1989). But the women in this study, given the relative privilege of their position in terms of educational resources and class background, might be expected to show a "certain affinity" in the way they approached this transition also. These would be the women, if any women could, who might be able to overcome some of the more disturbing personal consequences of becoming mothers.

When first surveyed, in 1985, 14 per cent were married. In 1986, 24 per cent were married and five per cent were raising children. When last surveyed, in the spring of 1992, 70 per cent were married and 31 per cent were raising children. The fact that some 70 per cent were *not* raising children -- in 1992, when their average age was 30 -- was not surprising. Delayed childbearing on the part of educated women has been well-documented (Gee, 1986; Grindstaff et al, 1991). But since *all* of these women were "educated", and 31 per cent of them had not postponed having children, it was necessary to look more closely at the differences emerging in the *timing* of the transition to motherhood in this apparently fairly homogeneous group. Comparing graduates from the five faculties included in the study -- arts, business, education, engineering and science -- it became clear that the women who were most likely to be mothers by 1992 were the education graduates, most of whom went on to become elementary school teachers. Further scrutiny of the data revealed that, of the women who did have children, it was the education graduates who were also more likely than graduates of other faculties to be combining motherhood with either full- or part-time paid employment.[2]

These differences raised some serious questions. These women were all well-educated, and destined for professional careers. The investment which each had made in her education would alone indicate a strong commitment to subsequent paid employment. And the collective level of education in the group would suggest more liberal gender role attitudes and an unwillingness to be drawn into traditional family situations. Yet the actual experiences of the different graduate groups by 1992 were obviously diverging. "Well-educated" and "professional" as general demographic descriptors clearly masked important, *consequential* differences in educational choices, and subsequent occupational decisions and opportunities -- differences not closely attended to in research on the transition to motherhood.

A major contribution of this study is to focus on women's educational backgrounds, the occupational choices which are then open to them, and the way this accumulated history affects both decisions about having children, and the employment decisions women make once they do have children. Interviews with 64 of the 185 women in the larger group explore these work and family decisions and their consequences. They uncover come critical implications of career establishment in general, and of particular occupational choices, both for family timing and mothers' career continuity.

---

[2] This information is set out in full in Chapter 4 (Tables 2 and 4).

Another contribution of this study is in the area of theory. The transition to motherhood is a stage in the life course of many women which is poorly theorized. Theorists working in the life course tradition have difficulty accommodating the discontinuities of many mothers' experiences of paid work, while feminist theorists have not yet got beyond the metaphor of the "double life" as a means of describing many women's attempts to synthesize work and family responsibilities. The contribution of this study is to critically examine the "double life" metaphor in terms of its relevance for well-educated, middle-class women.

A final contribution is to suggest the ways in which the freedom to *choose* motherhood seems to lead to strong feelings of responsibility and obligation on the part of well-educated, middle class women -- who then make a "career" of mothering, and become powerful torchbearers of traditional ideologies of motherhood.

The women in this study who are making choices about motherhood and employment are "an age group moving through history". Their decisions become part of, and are informed by, the broader social context. Fertility patterns among Canadian women in general, emerging trends in labour force participation rates of women with children, prevailing ideologies about motherhood and women's work, public policy and its effects on family decisions -- all form the general backdrop against which particular and individual decisions are made. This backdrop -- a literature review of important trends and issues -- is described in Chapter 2.

But particular decisions -- about having or not having children, about going out to work or staying home with a baby -- have consequences. Decisions surrounding the transition to motherhood have cumulative effects which are not always observable from close at hand. The task for individuals, and for theorists, is to make sense of the sequence of decisions and consequences which together constitute a life course. The practices of motherhood seldom mesh with the practices of the working world. Managing both, and integrating both into a coherent whole, pose both practical and theoretical problems, which are addressed in Chapter 3.

This study, with its emphasis on educational and occupational choices and their implications both for childbearing and childraising, attempted to address questions raised, not answered, by existing survey data. The survey data indicated the existence of relationships between occupational choice and both the timing of motherhood and employment decisions after childbirth. The interpretive goal of the present research was to explore how the relationships could be explained. Interviews with a sub-sample of the original survey sample were conducted to fulfil this goal. The research design and methodology of the present study are described in Chapter 4.

Chapters 5 to 9 are descriptive chapters which present the study's findings. The focus is on employment choices, and the distinction is between women who do and women who do not have children. Thus Chapter 5 describes how the women with children came to have them -- who "chose" to become mothers (and why), and which pregnancies were not planned.

Chapters 6 to 8 describe the lives of women with children. These chapters are structured in terms of the employment choices of the women at the time they were interviewed. Thus Chapter 6 introduces mothers who are in full-time paid employment, Chapter 7 discusses mothers who are in part-time paid employment, and Chapter 8 describes the larger group of women in this study who have withdrawn from formal paid employment.

More than 40 per cent of the women in the study did *not* have children at the time they were interviewed. Yet there were many reasons for their childlessness, and differences in the likely degree of permanence of the state. Some of them seemed likely to make the transition to motherhood quite soon; a few others leaned towards permanent, voluntary childlessness; still others were somewhere between these two extremes, highly ambivalent and occasionally quite troubled. All these women are introduced in Chapter 9.

Analysis of the findings is reserved for Chapter 10, which assesses the interview material in terms of the original research questions, notes new theoretical implications, and suggests directions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

BACKDROP: THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

The women graduates described in the last chapter are part of what Hareven (1978: 8) would call "an age group moving through history." These women, experiencing -- or postponing -- the transition to motherhood as they manage their individual work careers, help constitute the larger context of Canadian fertility trends and the changing forms of women's labour force participation. They are some of the people around whom public policy about families is enacted, and ideologies of motherhood and femininity are woven. The choices they make about their lives are influenced by, and in turn help to shape, their social context. This chapter considers the backdrop of social trends and issues against which these women's lives are lived. The important contextual issues, in the light of the foregoing, are fertility patterns, women's participation in paid employment and their occupational mobility, public policy related to women and families, ideologies of motherhood and women's employment choices after having children.

Demographic trends in fertility and women's employment

Fertility patterns

Three features of fertility patterns are of particular relevance for this research. First, fertility rates for Canadian women are declining. A comparison of census data shows that in 1991, Canadian women aged 30 to 34 had on average 1.68 children, compared to 1.88 for the same age group in 1981 and 2.78 in 1961 (Beaujot, 1995).

The second trend is increasing age at first childbirth. Gee (1986) considers this increase to be slight, on average, among recent cohorts. Given that the median age of first birth is 24.5 for the most recent cohort, most women are continuing to have their children relatively young. Grindstaff (1984) points out, however, that 25.1 per cent of all births to women aged 30 to 34 in 1981 were first births; in 1970, for the same age group, 13.9 per cent of births were first births. Similar increases in the percentage of first births were also evident for women aged 35-39, and 40-44. According to the 1991 census, 19 per cent of all women aged 30 to 34 had never had a child, compared to 14.2 per cent for the same age group in 1981, and 9.4 per cent in 1971 (Beaujot, 1995).

The third trend is the inverse relationship between education and fertility, which continues to hold. Indeed, Gee (1986) contends that the increase in age at first childbirth just described is a class phenomenon: "the people who are delaying childbearing are the well-educated, successful middle class -- a highly publicized and visible minority" (Gee, 1986: 275). Grindstaff et al (1991) note that the rationale for this enduring relationship has been that education delays marriage and hence the onset of childbearing. It also offers women alternatives to marriage and motherhood. Their study of ever-married women aged 35 in the 1981 census found that childless ever-married women and women who began their families after age 30 were better educated and more likely to be in professional occupations, compared to women of the same age who had children earlier. The 1991 census data indicates that 41.5 per cent of women aged 25-29 with a university education had had a child, compared to about 70 per cent of women of the same age with only high school education. (Ravanera, 1995).

Choosing children

Describing their demographic model of factors affecting the transition to parenthood, Rindfuss et al (1988) note one factor not included in the model -- the normative structure that individuals ought to become parents. At present, they claim, "the quantity of parenthood might change, but not the general expectation of it" (Rindfuss et al, 1988: 38).

Demographers are watching with interest the fertility behaviour of the cohort of individuals now in their 30s, who have contributed to a trend towards late first births, and who in many cases are continuing to postpone parenthood. Such postponement is not unprecedented: Beaujot (1995) points out that the same proportion of 30- to 34-year-old women had delayed childbearing in 1941 as were deferring it in 1991; Rindfuss et al point out that a similar pattern of age at entry to parenthood existed in the 1930s, and that in fact the Depression-era cohort of 1910 has almost exactly the same profile as the 1954 cohort for the United States. But modern contraception, expanded employment opportunities for women, and the well-documented difficulty of combining work and family, may lead to increased rates of voluntary childlessness among individuals now in their 30s.

It is in fact the issue of postponement that may be of most interest. In her study of voluntary childlessness, Veevers (1973, 1980) found that more a third of the childless couples she interviewed made childlessness an explicit condition of the marriage. The more common course was prolonged postponement -- childbearing put off to some future time which never came. Daniels and Weingarten (1982), in their sample of 86 U.S. couples, found several different family-timing scenarios:

- the *natural ideal*, which views children as "what come naturally", and parenthood as not a subject for deliberation;
- the *brief wait*, which entails a two- or three-year deferment of parenthood after marriage so the couple may enjoy

each other before "settling down";

- *programmatic postponement*, which entails putting off parenthood until personal and professional goals are achieved. Postponement, according to Daniels and Weingarten, was increasingly popular in the 1970s; demographic evidence cited above suggests that it continues to be.

Soloway and Smith (1987), in their study of couples who had children after the age of 30, found that the decision to have a child involved reassessment of some formerly strong injunctions against starting a family until educational goals were met, careers were established, finances were secure and the marriage solid. This reassessment, impelled by pressure from the biological time clock, then led to the asking of "Who am I?" questions. The researchers considered that the need to satisfactorily answer these questions meant that "an individual feels independent and emotionally separate from the family of origin, yet sufficiently identified with the parent of the same sex to take on the parenting role" (Soloway and Smith, 1987: 261). Women in Currie's (1988) study identified career or employment security, a "suitable relationship" (meaning a supportive partner who would share the childcare responsibilities with women who planned to continue work), and financial security as major components of the "right time" to have a baby. Currie noted that the "right time" did not refer to age, or the time in the respondent's life, so much as to a configuration of material circumstances. And the arrival of the "right time" did not necessarily signal the decision to have a baby, but rather the woman's readiness to decide one way or the other.

The heavy emphasis in all the foregoing on parenthood as a "choice" is not to deny the reality of human frailty and/or contraceptive failure which may catapult individuals into parenthood against their wishes or their better judgment. But the extent to which educated women are delaying pregnancy suggests a high level of planning and control. Worth noting, however, is the extent to which fertility delayed into the 30s is voluntary or involuntary. McFalls (1990) suggests that the warnings of the biological clock may not be altogether misplaced: the findings of several studies suggest that the proportion of women with impaired ability to reproduce increases steadily from age 15 to age 50, with the increase becoming sharper after age 30. The risk of being unable to bear a child seems to increase from about six per cent at ages 20 to 24, to about 16 per cent at ages 30 to 34 -- and to about 30 per cent at ages 35 to 39.

Women's participation in paid employment

Two trends in Canadian women's employment help provide a backdrop to a study of employment patterns among the Alberta graduates. First, Canadian women's participation rates in the paid labour force, after increasing steadily for nearly four decades, have shown a slight downturn since 1991. In 1993, 57.5 per cent of Canadian women had paying jobs, down from 58.4 per cent in 1990 (Statistics Canada, 1994). This downturn is generally attributed to the overall decline in the economy (Basset, 1994) and almost exclusively affected women aged 15 to 24. But even in spite of the downturn, contemporary participation rates are high compared to 45 per cent in 1976 and 29.1 per cent in 1961. In 1993, 61.4 per cent of married women were in the paid labour force, as were 63.4 per cent of women with preschool children. Labour force participation rates were also higher for Alberta women (64 per cent) than for those in Ontario (60 per cent) or British Columbia (58 per cent) (Statistics Canada, 1994). In the 30- to 34-years age group, 71.9 per cent of women with pre-school children were in the paid labour force in 1991, and 33.2 per cent were working full-time (Beaujot, 1995).

Secondly, part-time work continues to form a substantial part of Canadian women's paid labour force participation. In 1986, 25.9 per cent of all female employment was part-time, and 71.2 per cent of all part-time workers were women (McKie, 1992). In 1989, women aged 25-44 comprised 31.3 per cent of Canada's part time work-force. While men (and women) tend to work part-time when they are young, and probably juggling part-time work with education, women work part-time when they are somewhat older, often also at the time they are raising children. In 1993, 29.2 per cent of women with pre-school children were working part-time (Statistics Canada, 1994). Of the total labour force participation of 30- to 34-year-old women with preschool children cited above by Beaujot (1995), 38.7 per cent were working part-time in 1991.

Women's employment patterns and occupational mobility

Though parenthood is estimated to improve men's standing in the work world, there is no evidence that it improves women's occupational mobility. On the contrary, there is good evidence that time out of the paid work force for childbirth and childrearing, and the part-time work which is the route back to paid work chosen by many mothers, may limit women's labour force progress. The research which most clearly shows the labour force consequences of life course transitions like motherhood are longitudinal studies of women's life and work histories. Two of the most often-cited British studies (described below) provide "retrospective longitudinal data" derived from one-time, intensely detailed interviews with respondents.

(i) The British National Training Survey, conducted during 1975 and 1976, provides retrospective longitudinal data on the work histories of more than 50,000 individuals, approximately 25,000 of them women. Stewart and Greenhalgh (1984), in their analysis of this data, focus on women's work history patterns, or spells in and out of work. They report the following findings:

(a) For the cohort of women aged 45-54 (and assumed to have completed their childbearing), those who entered non-manual or skilled manual jobs were more likely to have worked continuously; 16.8 per cent did so, compared to 7.6 per cent of those who entered personal service jobs.

(b) For the same women, those whose work experience was interrupted earned substantially less on average than those who did not, and each successive interruption resulted in a further reduction.

(c) The probability of a woman working in an occupational category requiring more formal training and more dependent on some form of "career ladder" was reduced by interruptions, and reduced more by longer interruptions (more than 10 years) than shorter ones (five years or less).

(ii) The 1976 wave of the U.S. Panel Study of Income Dynamics asked detailed work history questions of 5,000 households. Corcoran (1979) analyzed this data to examine the relationship between women's work participation and labour market earnings, and to test the findings of Mincer and Polachek (1974) that the extent and continuity of work participation are critical determinants of wage differences among women and between women and men. She found:

(a) A majority of working women had very discontinuous work histories. More than three out of five women had not worked for at least one period of a year or more since leaving school, and one out of five had experienced at least two distinct non-work periods. Black women had experienced fewer and shorter spells of non-work than white women, but less than half of all black women had worked continuously since completing school.

(b) The continuity of work experience did *not* appear to be a crucial determinant of wage differentials between white men and women -- except that workers who drop out of the labour force tend to have less tenure in their jobs. Different patterns of labour force participation and withdrawal also did not seem to differentiate between women in the group. Corcoran does note, however, that women's wages in the first few years following labour market withdrawal may be depressed, and that average differences in the volume of work experience account for a considerable portion of the male-female wage gap.

(iii) The British Women and Employment Survey collected retrospective longitudinal life and work history information on a sample of 5,320 women aged between 16 and 59 in 1980. Dex (1986) used this data to construct six profiles to describe the patterns of women's work experiences. Interruptions to paid employment were commonplace to the point of being simply assumed; Dex's profiles reflect women's attachments, over time and across work interruptions, to particular kinds of work. [1]

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[1] The six profiles are teacher; nurse; clerical; skilled; semi-skilled factory; semi-skilled. Other professionals were excluded because their numbers in the sample were too small, and according to Dex most were unable to maintain a professional profile even prior to childbirth.

Women's movement between jobs was a central focus of the empirical analysis. Dex found that the percentage of women who experienced downward mobility increased with age, with most downward moves (40 to 45 per cent) occurring over the childrearing phase. Twenty-five per cent of all downward moves in fact occurred over the transition from last job before childbirth to first after childbirth. The teachers in the sample were most likely to retain their status over the first childbirth transition (as were the small number of professional women). Over half the nurses and semi-skilled factory workers also retained their status. But at least 60 per cent of women in semi-skilled occupations, sales and childcare experienced downward mobility.

Dex concludes that upward mobility balances downward mobility for some women, but for "a significant number" of women, the downward move is permanent. When it occurs over childbirth, Dex maintains, it is more likely to be caused by a move to part-time work. In Britain it is "the structure of opportunities, whereby part-time jobs are 'crummy' jobs, which makes the choice of a part-time job so detrimental to women's careers, and wasteful" (Dex, 1986: 88). Similar conclusions based on the Women in Employment Survey data are drawn by Elias (1988).

(iv) A small-scale British longitudinal study (1982-1987) of London women in the first three years after childbirth is reported by Brannen (1989). The study considers the employment careers of two groups of women: those who intended to resume their former full-time jobs after maternity leave and the birth of their first child (N=188) and a second group who intended to stay at home with their children (N= 67). Over the three years 40 per cent of those who intended to stay home had returned to paid employment, and 18 per cent of those who intended to return to paid employment had instead returned home.

At the end of the three years, six work histories were in evidence: those who took maternity leave, returned to the same jobs and employers, and continued full time (42 per cent); those who returned to the same jobs and employers after maternity leave but reduced their hours (nine per cent); those who returned to the same jobs after maternity leave and subsequently changed employers (18 per cent); those who resigned during maternity leave (or did not take it) and subsequently found new, mainly part-time jobs (14 per cent); those who resigned during or before maternity leave and did not work outside the home again (nine per cent); those who took maternity leave, returned to their former jobs, then resigned and did not work again (eight per cent). More than half of those who intended to return to work were in what Brannen calls high-status jobs before the birth -- teaching (23 per cent), intermediate non-manual (16 per cent); nursing, medical and social occupations (13 per cent).

For those who returned to paid employment, occupational mobility was estimated by comparing women's last jobs before the birth with their first jobs since the birth. Changes in grade within the same occupation were also covered. Three years after the first birth, 24 per cent of the women were downwardly mobile -- 67 per cent of them between occupations; 17 per cent were upwardly mobile; and most women (59 per cent) stayed at the same level, though not necessarily in the same job. Only seven per cent of the continuously employed were downwardly mobile. There were also occupational differences in the likelihood of experiencing downward mobility. For example, those who were previously in the intermediate non-manual category were much more likely to be downwardly mobile than were those in the professional group (who were mainly teachers). Downward mobility was mainly experienced between occupations, with some 60 per cent of the cases representing teachers, nurses or other intermediate non-manual workers moving into clerical, sales and manual work.

(v) McRae (1991) reports findings from a British postal survey of some 5,000 women who had babies in December 1987 and January 1988. Fifty-three per cent of the women had been in paid employment during the pregnancy; 45 per cent of these women had resumed employment within nine months of the birth, and 20 per cent were looking for work. Fifteen per cent of the women who had worked during the pregnancy returned to full-time work. McRae also notes the following findings:

(a) The rate at which women who worked full-time before the birth return to work after childbirth, and whether they return full-time or part-time, is strongly influenced by occupational status and type of employer. Women professionals were the most likely to return (65 per cent) and the most likely to return full-time (42 per cent). McRae points out that this occupational grouping includes librarians, teachers and health professionals -- all well-known sources of higher-level employment for women, and mainly conducted in the public sector.

(b) Relatively high rates of return to work after childbirth (for women who worked full-time before the birth) are linked to relatively low rates of occupational mobility. Women professionals and associate professionals (considered to include social workers and health workers) were the most likely to return to work and the least likely to experience downward mobility, whether their return was full-time or part-time. McRae notes that this is mainly a consequence of returning to their previous employers, through the combined effect of employment in the public sector and qualification for the statutory right to return (McRae, 1991: 598).

(c) Women who had worked full-time before the birth in managerial or administrative work had relatively high rates of return (48 per cent, half to full-time and half to part-time work). But they were particularly likely to experience downward mobility, especially if they had returned part-time.

Twenty-nine per cent of the part-time returners in this category went back to jobs at a lower level, usually clerical work. Clerical and secretarial workers who returned part time (18 per cent) were also likely to experience downward mobility. In fact 26 per cent of them moved into sales, personal and protective service or manual jobs.

(vi) Greenstein (1989) studied a subsample of 716 women drawn from U.S. National Longitudinal Surveys of the Labour Market Experience of Young Women. His respondents represented the set of all married husband-present women who experienced a first live birth between 1968 and 1983. Greenstein's study concerned the factors influencing length of time out of the labour force following a first birth. He found that women with relatively high incomes, relatively high levels of prebirth work experience and relatively high levels of education reenter the paid labour force more quickly and in greater numbers than women scoring lower on these human capital variables. On the other hand, women who delayed marriage and the first birth tended to re-enter the paid labour force less quickly than women who married and produced a first child at a relatively young age. Greenstein speculates that this apparent paradox may be explained by the fact that women who marry and produce children early are more likely to be in low-paying jobs with restricted maternity leave benefits, and so feel financial pressure to return to work sooner. Women who delay marriage and childbirth are more likely to be better educated, and in jobs with higher pay and better benefits.

Detailed longitudinal studies of the type described above are not available for Canadian women, though both the 1984 Family History Survey and Robinson's (1986) use of the Social Change in Canada Surveys of 1977,1979 and 1981 are suggestive. From the Family History Survey, Burch points out that major reasons for men's work interruptions were layoff, school and illness, in that order. For women the major reasons were childcare, marriage and layoff, in that order. Stated differently, less than one per cent of men who experienced a work interruption reported that it was due to "marriage, pregnancy, or childcare, or to move in order to be with a partner". But these were the reasons for interruption for 64 per cent of the women respondents. "The exigencies of marriage, pregnancy and childcare had a major impact on the continuity of work for a large majority of women, but almost no impact for men" (Burch, 1985; 26). From their analysis of the Family History Survey, Li and Currie (1992) further concluded that work interruption is more likely to decrease the probability of a return to work for women than for men, and it "severely reduces" women's likelihood of full-time employment (Li and Currie, 1992: 221). Robinson (1986) incorporated work interruptions into an analysis of women's occupational attainment (which conventionally considers only length of work experience, and not the circumstances under which that experience is accumulated.) She found that work interruptions had a significant negative effect.

The 1973 Canadian Mobility Study compared women's current jobs with their reports of their first jobs in order to estimate intra-generational mobility among other things. An attempt was also made to analyze the mobility patterns of continuously employed women, whose career paths were estimated to be most like those of men, and who "might be said to have paid the cost of foregoing at least part of the possible emotional satisfaction of traditional family life in order to pursue career goals" (Goyder, in Boyd et al, 1985: 310). But these assumptions were not tested, and the study made no comparisons of women's labour force participation before and after they have children.

In general, however, the accumulated survey evidence seems to suggest that Canadian women experience downward occupational mobility after childbirth. Also suggestive, however, is the evidence that increasing numbers of Canadian women with children are choosing part-time work. Duffy and Pupo (1992b) note that most part-time jobs are generally unskilled or deskilled, in female-dominated occupations in the service sector. They estimate that only about one part-time worker in five or six may be classified as managerial or professional.

Public policy and the employment of women with children

Much of the demographic information cited earlier for Canadian women reflects world-wide trends. Bumpass (1990) notes, for example, that sub-replacement fertility levels are now common in all Western industrialized countries. The observed increases in Canadian women's return to the paid labour force after childbirth also reflect global trends. But international comparisons suggest that the *form* of women's participation is strongly influenced by public policies relating to maternity benefits, tax structures and child care.

The international perspective

(i) In *Britain*, women who return to work after childbirth overwhelmingly return to part-time jobs, most of which are unskilled and low-paying. Subsidized or state-run child care is almost non-existent; British women are forced to depend on private child care arrangements, frequently using family members. Part-time work is increasingly structured to fit the hours mothers of young children are likely to be available (late afternoons and evenings, for example). These are also times when husbands can be expected to assume child care duties (Beechey and Perkins, 1987; Brannen, 1989; Dex and Shaw, 1986).

(ii) In the *United States*, full-time employment for mothers is much more common than in Britain. Dex and Shaw

(1986, 1988) compared longitudinal data on women's work experience in the two countries, and conclude that American women are moving towards taking very little time off for childbirth, returning to full-time jobs and paying for child care. The authors speculate that tax deductions or credits for child care (not available in Britain) may have made it somewhat easier for American women to work full-time. Dex and Shaw also note the availability of more higher-grade non-manual and clerical jobs open to American women. They consider the possibility that "the earlier enactment and more aggressive enforcement" of equal opportunities laws in the U.S. have contributed to the difference (Dex and Shaw, 1988: 194-194). On the other hand, social policy critics point out that the absence of maternity or parental leave provisions obliges "far too many American parents" to find child care for infants only a few weeks old. Much of this child care is "inadequate, mostly informal and unregulated, and a cause for concern" (Kamerman and Kahn, 1991:3).

(iii) In *France*, pro-natalist policies aimed at encouraging women to have more children are also enabling women with children to remain in full-time employment. Jenson (1986) sees the origins of contemporary policy support for working mothers in state concerns at the turn of the century about infant mortality and child health. Jenson notes that the British government, with similar concerns, isolated the cause as women's employment and proceeded to enact "protective" legislation which made it progressively more difficult for women to work. But in France, women's paid employment was assumed to be necessary and even desirable; the "cause" of poor infant health was located in the premature return to work of mothers after childbirth. Thus, while in Britain the foundations of the "welfare state" were being laid, in France maternity leaves were incorporated into the labour code. Other family-oriented policies also facilitate French women's full-time work: an almost comprehensive system of preschool education is available to children from the age of three (80 per cent of all three-year-olds participate); and the French system of taxation allows working women to retain considerably more of their income than is the case in Britain, at least (Beechey, 1989; Dex and Walters, 1990; Bouillaguet-Bernard and Gauvin, 1988).

(iii) In *Israel*, according to Izraeli (1992), public policies have enabled, even encouraged, women to combine family and work, but not to build careers. Government's "pragmatic approach" to women's employment is reflected in its policies relating to child care and the length of the school day. In the 1970s, young mothers were needed to help fill labour shortages caused by the expansion of military forces after the Six Days War, the development of defence and other industries, and the growth of community services. The state expanded facilities for preschoolers and assumed responsibility for the infrastructure of childcare services previously administered by voluntary women's organizations. Priority was given to the children of working mothers, and payment was graduated according to mothers' income only. However in the 1980s, economic recession caused construction budgets for childcare services to be cut sharply, and payment for day care was linked to the family's total income. Izraeli points out that the special character of public policy that most effectively curtails women's careers is the length of the school day. While there are extensive (though not sufficient) day-long services for children from six months to three years, children aged from three to seven or eight attend school for only four hours a day. Those from eight to 11 attend school for five hours, while high school children's schedules vary daily but average six hours a day. After considerable lobbying by women's groups, the Knesset in 1990 passed the "Long School Day Law", which would lengthen the school day to eight hours -- but no commitment has been made as to when it will be implemented across the country.

Motherhood, claims the writer, is a national as well as a family role; Israeli society places a high symbolic value on the family, and on women's work within it. This work is assigned to women, and husbands' participation does not differ significantly whether or not women work outside the home. Women's strategies, in the face of widely held ideologies of motherhood and the benevolent paternalism of state policies, are to seek part-time work, or to select "occupational niches" such as the civil service, which offers convenient working hours.

(v) In *Sweden*, a long-term social democratic commitment to class and gender equality has produced policies which look utopian from the vantage point of other less family-oriented jurisdictions. Sundstrom (1991) describes four major components of Swedish family policy: first,extensive economic support for families with children, of which the most important ingredient is the child allowance; second, a comprehensive system of heavily subsidized public child care, including day care centres, family day care, and after-school facilities; third, parental insurance benefits, which include leave benefits for the care of newborn children, cash benefits for the occasional care of children, pregnancy benefits and childbirth leave for fathers; fourth, employment benefits in the form of leave entitlements linked to insurance benefits. (Parents also have the right to reduce their working hours to care for young children.)

Another incentive for married women wanting paid employment is the Swedish tax system, which allows for separate tax assessment of spouses and results in lower taxes for the lower salary (Sandqvist, 1992).

Not surprisingly, this environment sustains extremely high rates of participation by women in the paid labour force. In 1987, 73 per cent of households with children under three were dual-earner; both parents worked in 90 per cent of households with children aged 12 to 16 (Sundstrom, 1991). Sandqvist points out that much of the increase in female labour force participation has occurred for mothers of young children working between 20 and 35 hours per week. Often called "long part-time" and generally equivalent to six hours of work a day, this arrangement carries the same benefits and job security provisions as full-time work. Sandqvist points out that in some economic sectors parents are easily able to choose the extent of their work reduction, and to increase their hours as their children get older and more independent. More recently, there has been a further a shift by women away from continuous part-time work and towards continuous full-time employment (Sundstrom, 1993). Yet in spite of these high rates of women's labour force participation, fertility in Sweden was also increasing through the 1980s. Hoem (1993) claims that the increase has occurred as a direct result of a policy change which entitles parents to retain the benefits paid out after the birth of one child until after the birth of the next, provided it occurs within 30 months.

Canadian public policy

The particular conjunction of public policy and ideology is perhaps harder to observe and unravel close to home. If public policy in Israel encourages women to combine work and family, but not to build careers, Canadian public policy seems to permit women to build careers, but only if they can meet family needs without public support. Maternity leave benefits are available through Canada's Unemployment Insurance scheme to women who have been continuously employed for a qualifying period of 20 weeks; the benefits provide approximately 55 per cent of the woman's salary for up to 15 weeks. In addition, 10 weeks of parental leave, with the same rate of funding, are available to either parent. In 1991, 89 per cent of maternity absences were paid, compared to 77 per cent in 1980, and 92 per cent in 1986 and 1987. Of the women who took paid maternity leave in 1991, 77 per cent received only the Unemployment Insurance benefits. Another 17 per cent received Unemployment Insurance benefits accompanied by other forms of compensation, such as group insurance benefits or employer top-ups (Statistics Canada, 1994).

But there are few other publicly-funded family benefits available in Canada. Universal family allowance payments have been abolished, and replaced by a child tax benefit based on family income. Public provision of affordable childcare is very far short of the need -- a fact which affects all working women, but is particularly critical for low-income women. The 1988 Canadian National Child Care Survey (Statistics Canada, 1993) found that approximately 595,700 families with at least one pre-school child needed full-time care. Another 276,000 needed care for less than 30 hours a week for one or more preschoolers. Of the 559,000 children up to 17 months old who needed some child care beyond what parents could provide, 17.7

per cent (the largest proportion) were cared for away from home by a relative; in 10.3 per cent of cases the relative cared for the child in its own home. Nearly 16 per cent were in unlicensed family day care, and in 10.3 per cent of cases the babysitter came to the child's home. Only 3.2 per cent of these children were in day care centres. The 1990 General Social Survey found that 45 per cent of Canadian families with pre-school children required child care on a regular basis. Of these families, 43 per cent used a sitter or neighbour; three per cent used a workplace day care centre, and 28 per cent used a day care centre outside the workplace (Statistics Canada, 1994).

Women's work and ideologies of motherhood

Public policy, as suggested by the international examples cited above, can shape women's options in very practical ways. Policy options are usually accompanied by a legitimizing ideology which constructs the only officially sanctioned alternative as the best alternative, as normative. Brannen (1989) points out, for example, that in Britain the ideological construction of motherhood is a key factor shaping women's employment decisions. Mothering is constructed as a full-time exclusive activity when children are small, so the absence of public provision for child care can be justified as being in the best interests of children. Thus, according to Brannen, when British women with children do undertake paid employment, as many are financially obliged to do, their construction of their paid work is as a peripheral activity, secondary to their main household responsibilities. Similarly, their earnings are viewed as surplus to the family's most essential needs, even when they account for 40 per cent or so of total household income (Brannen and Moss, 1987; Wilson, 1987).

Ideologies of motherhood also prevail in the labour market, where pervasive stereotypes about women's primary commitment to home and family affect job opportunities for women with children, and the kinds of employment conditions they seek -- even when, in the case of childless women, or women whose children have left home, the stereotype clearly doesn't fit (Brannen, 1989; Collinson, Knights and Collinson, 1990; Cunnison, 1987). Job segregation, the sex-typing of jobs, gendered definitions of skill in paid employment, the enduring gender gap in wages and the difficulties of implementing employment equity policies are comprehensively documented. The underlying, usually unspoken, indeed often unconscious devaluation of women in paid employment has at its root the belief that women are ultimately responsible for home and family.

Where women, especially women with children, *have* been able to take on paying jobs, they have usually done so by working a "second shift," to borrow Hochschild's (1989) term. Women's continuing responsibility for household work and child care is also extensively documented. Recent studies from several countries, including Canada, demonstrate that women spend substantially more time at such work than their partners, even when both work full-time outside the home (Marshall, 1993; Brayfield, 1992; McAllister, 1990; Shelton, 1992). Even more compelling than the data on populations of women and men, however, are the many smaller-scale, often qualitative studies of women workers and their struggles to cope with the double day (for example, Hochschild, 1989; Yeandle, 1984; Freeman, 1990; Luxton, 1983; Hessing, 1993).

Duffy, Mandell and Pupo (1989) summarize the realities of life for most women as follows:

> Family ideology continues to prescribe that a certain core of domestic labour is woman's work, regardless of whether a woman engages in wage labour, whether she is economically self-sufficient, or whether she cares for her own children or for those of someone else. The only equivalent assumption for men is their attachment to paid labour. Housework and childcare are not voluntary for married women unless they are able to pay others to perform these tasks. Even then, the norms of good mothering relegate the ultimate responsibility for the family's happiness and well-being, its success or failure, to the mother. (Duffy, Mandell and Pupo, 1989: 102).

At the same time, as Brannen (1989) points out, women who continue in the paid labour force lack more than institutional support. They also lack a countervailing ideology which would legitimate a continuous, upwardly mobile and independent commitment to employment. The exigencies of the dual earning lifestyle are managed by women; employed mothers have to rely on individual strategies, and their own personal resources.

Furthermore, says Brannen, they do not expect much support from others. If they can successfully combine both work and family roles, they regard themselves as "lucky exceptions" (Brannen, 1989: 198).

Some writers (for example, Goldscheider and Waite, 1991) note the "double shift" realities of many women's lives, but take a hopeful view of the small changes observed to have occurred in family gender roles. Others are much less sanguine. Thompson and Walker (1989), reviewing studies on family work and parenting, note the belief of middle-class mothers that whatever marital equality they had achieved before having children ended with parenthood. They conclude: "Mothers end up doing most of the child care and housework regardless of what pattern was established or expected before children arrived" (Thompson and Walker, 1989: 863). LaRossa and LaRossa (1981), in their study of middle-class couples making the transition to parenthood, found that fathers would periodically move in to relieve mothers of primary responsibility for the baby. But when they did take over, they almost always assumed that they were "helping" their wives rather than "sharing" the parental responsibilities.

In the face of this inequity, couples (particularly women) need to find ways to explain it (to themselves and others) in such a way as to defuse or circumvent the conflict which would inevitably arise if the problem were to be directly confronted. Hochschild (1989), on the basis of her interviews with dual-career couples struggling to share the second shift, describes three different gender ideologies about marital roles -- traditional, transitional, and egalitarian. But she also distinguishes between intellectual and practical support for an ideological position, and notes the "gender strategies" used to obscure this distinction. Thus some men, while intellectually supporting egalitarian marital roles, will find ways to avoid actually behaving in an egalitarian manner. And many women subscribe to "family myths" which either account for inequities ("his job is too demanding for him to help more at home") or deny that they exist. Blain's (1994) discussion of family discourse and gendered practice in dual-earner families makes similar points.

This is *not* to say that all women necessarily subscribe to ideologies which commit them to full responsibility for home and family, or collude in family myths which misrepresent the true state of things. Luxton (1983) notes that more than half the women she interviewed on her return visit to Flin Flon were, as full-time workers themselves, committed to an equal sharing of household work, but had not managed to shift spouses' behaviour accordingly. Research by Wearing (1984) and Luker (1984) identified a competing ideology of motherhood, which recognized the needs of the mother as well as the child, the possibility that motherhood is not the ultimate source of fulfilment for all women, and the value of children relating to a number of adult caregivers. This alternate view receives implicit support from a wide array of feminist studies, both empirical and autobiographical, on the experience of motherhood (for example, Boulton, 1983; Oakley, 1980; Rich, 1986; Rosenberg, 1987; Rossiter, 1988). Collectively, these studies attest to the pain, frustration, loneliness and tedium which frequently accompany the practice of mothering in contemporary industrialized society.

To what extent are women directly influenced in their decisions about paid employment by societal beliefs about mothering and/or attitudes to the economic role of women? As Lowe and Krahn (1985) point out, the research findings are mixed. Their own results, from a survey of 179 married couples in Edmonton, suggest that situational factors such as the presence of preschool children, the wife's age and her educational credentials are much stronger predictors of women's employment patterns than are the gender attitudes of either partner. In fact, though, the presence of preschool children is *not* a structural, situational constraint in the way that, for example, a lack of jobs in a woman's field of expertise is a structural constraint. The preschool child may be a structural constraint on a woman's paid employment if she has no alternative child care resources available; the child is a constraint of a different sort if the woman believes that maternal care is best.

Hock and her associates (Hock et al, 1984; Hock et al,

1985) studied the connection between women's employment plans and career orientation, their attitudes toward the maternal role, non-maternal care, and their perceptions of various aspects of infant behaviour. Their subjects were first interviewed in the maternity ward and then followed up for 12 months. The researchers found that mothers who planned to return to work, and later did so, were the most career-oriented. While having positive attitudes toward the maternal role, these women were "only moderately apprehensive" about nonmaternal care, and were less likely than other mothers to attribute infant separation distress as being related to the mother's impending absence. Mothers who planned to remain at home, and later did so, had the lowest career orientation, the highest positive attitude about the maternal role, and the greatest anxiety about separation from their infants. Greater conflict between maternal role perceptions and work plans was evident among mothers who changed their minds about their work plans.

Greenstein (1986) analyzed panel data from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Labor Market Experience of Young Women. His sample of 895 married women had had a first birth prior to the 1978 NLS interview. Greenstein found that women's attitudes toward married women in the workplace were strongly related to their labour force participation after childbirth. Those with positive attitudes were more likely to return to paid employment. In Greenstein's model, this variable produced a stronger effect than the woman's age, her educational credentials, or her husband's income.

The almost perfect congruence between attitude and behaviour evident in the Hock and Greenstein studies could mean that women's attitudes do indeed guide their behaviour. It could also mean that their behaviour shapes their attitudes -- or that they do what they have to do, and that their attitudes as expressed in a survey bear no relation to what they really think.

There is evidence from other sources, however, to support the suggestion of Lowe and Krahn's study: women make pragmatic, rather than idealistic choices -- however much conflict they may feel if their behaviour seems to run counter to ideological prescriptions. For example, Bumpass (1990) points out that three-quarters of U.S. women in 1970 thought that a mother's working was harmful to a preschool child. Yet in the years since, the proportion of U.S. mothers of young children in paid employment has doubled to almost half. Even among mothers of preschoolers who are now working full time, only about half disagree that such work is harmful to children (Bumpass, 1990: 489). Strong institutional preference and support for the devoted mother present in the home comes from a particularly influential source -- the educational system. For example, Griffith and Smith (1991) describe the way in which mothering practices must be articulated to the requirements of the school system, and the difficulties this poses for women who are unable to match the skills and resources which many middle-class women are able to devote to child development. Dehli (1994) describes how a "pedagogy of love" which developed with the growth of public school kindergartens in Toronto came to regulate the mothering practices of working class women, as well as organize the practice of middle-class women.

Women's employment choices after childbirth

Women with pre-school children and household responsibilities typically occupy one of three categories: they may work full-time in the home; they may combine part-time paid employment with work in the home; or they may choose full-time paid employment. With any form of paid employment, some child care must be delegated [2], and other household work either delegated, reduced, or rescheduled. The more hours of paid employment that are undertaken, the more delegation and rescheduling are needed. Given that women generally bear ultimate responsibility for household and family work, the decision on whether to undertake additional paid work is a serious one. Assuming that returning to paid work is a choice and not an economic necessity, what *does* influence the choice?

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[2] The exception here is when the paid employment -- which could take such diverse forms as piecework sewing, freelance writing or computer-linked office work -- takes place in the home. The extent to which this work option is used by women in the Youth Employment Study has not been analyzed.

Factors that predispose a woman to return to paid employment may be better known than those that predispose her to remain at home. For example, Greenstein's (1989) review of research in the area suggests the following list: partner's income; woman's earning potential; costs involved in replacing the woman's childcare and household labour; the woman's "taste for market work" and her previous labour force experience; and demographic factors such as the woman's age at first birth and at first marriage, and the interval between marriage and first birth. Cotton et al (1989) studied the relationship between work attachment and employment of women with children. They asked Australian women (working either full-time in paid work, part-time in paid work or full-time at home) to evaluate possible reasons for choosing paid employment when they had young children (those not currently in paid employment were asked how important the reasons would be if they did return to paid work). The women's work attachment was measured as the proportion of equivalent full-time paid employment since the first birth. The researchers found that women with high work attachment (who had been in full-time paid work for 50 per cent or more of the time since the first birth) supported more non-financial, intrinsic reasons for working. Women with low work attachment cited extreme financial need as the only reason that would induce them to enter the paid labour force. Volling and Belsky (1993) found that women with higher levels of education, more prestigious occupations and larger prenatal incomes cited their own career development and "personal enjoyment" as reasons for returning to work. (Volling and Belsky, 1993: 9).

But we also know from studies cited earlier that certain factors directly related to women's human capital -- high levels of education, and professional jobs -- predispose some women to return quickly to full-time paid employment after childbirth, whether or not there is a financial need. The study by Gerson (1985) of 63 Californian women concluded that women's labour force experiences have an important effect on the employment choices they make as mothers -- sometimes even challenging long-held beliefs and intentions. For example, women who intended to remain in the labour force after having children but later changed their minds frequently did so because of blocked mobility or other unsatisfying work experience. Conversely, those who intended to stay home but instead returned to the paid labour force were often those who found their jobs unexpectedly satisfying and fulfilling.

Other studies examine the effects of particular occupations or types of occupations on women's management of work and family roles. For example, Evetts (1988) discusses the strategies available to a sample of British schoolteachers -- including, for some, the possibility of bringing preschool children to work with them. Olson et al (1990) compare U.S. women qualified for a predominantly female occupation (Master of Library Science) with those qualified for a predominantly male field (Master of Business Administration). The researchers found that nearly equal percentages of librarians and MBAs experienced at least one job interruption; librarians were somewhat more likely to work part-time than were the MBAs (and to suffer less financial penalty for doing so -- though MBAs' salaries were on average 50 per cent higher to begin with). From an analysis of two British data sets, the 1981 Labour Force Survey and the 1980 Women and Employment Survey, Dale (1987) concludes that women who leave the labour market are likely to find it difficult to re-enter an organizationally-based internal labour market, especially if they are unable to work full-time. However, a specific *occupational* qualification is likely to continue to enable re-entry to an occupationally-based internal labour market such as teaching, nursing, physiotherapy, speech therapy and occupational therapy, in all of which women predominate. Dale notes that such occupationally-based internal labour markets offer entry at any point as long as the appropriate credentials are held. Mobility is typically between employers, and there are no "ports of entry" with age barriers to be negotiated (Dale, 1987: 341).

This leads to the broader issue of whether jobs which are traditionally women's jobs are in fact more responsive to women's family responsibilities. One reason to think they might be is simply that traditional women's jobs provide a supportive community of women in similar family situations. Hessing's (1991) study of women clerical workers examined the content of their office conversations about their domestic and family affairs with this possibility in mind. Many of the women did find support and enjoyment from sharing their non-work lives. But there were also pressures to minimize such disclosures as both inappropriate and "less important" than work-related matters. Another reason why women might choose traditional occupations, according to human capital theory, is that these jobs require less commitment and effort, and are therefore easier to combine with family responsibilities. Another explanation for women's possible preference for traditional female occupations during their childrearing years might be that they offer some structural support in the sense of greater flexibility of scheduling or working conditions.

On most of these possibilities, the evidence is mixed. Bielby and Bielby (1988, 1989), in research using the U.S. Quality of Employment Surveys of 1973 and 1977, conclude that women in fact allocate more effort to their work than men, particularly when their family situations and human capital are comparable. They also note that levels of work identity did not differ for people in male-dominated or female-dominated lines of work. Glass (1990) found, in further analysis of the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey, that "predominantly female jobs are not necessarily jobs with characteristics that would accommodate family responsibilities." Net of other factors, workers in such jobs were less likely to report that their jobs were easier or more flexible, and they were no more likely than workers in male-dominated occupations to report that social relations were harmonious (Glass, 1990: 792). Rosenfeld and Spenner (1992) measured the extent of job shifts between male- and female-dominated occupations in a longitudinal study of high school students last interviewed in 1979 as they were entering their 30s. Results of event history analysis suggested that family variables do not influence shifts away from male-dominated occupations and toward female-dominated ones. But as the researchers themselves acknowledge, gaps in their data set make any conclusions tentative. And lower-order results might actually be more telling: almost two-thirds of the women in the sample had jobs in female-dominated occupations across their work histories. Although there was "considerable movement across gender barriers," the flow was stronger towards female- than male-dominated occupations (Rosenfeld and Spenner, 1992: 429-430).

A disadvantage of studies like those noted above is that they use data now nearly 20 years old. Other studies, while using less extensive data bases, are in some ways closer to contemporary social reality. For example, Devine's (1992) case study of British women professional engineers and scientists was carried out between 1988 and 1990. She found that childcare responsibilities were judged to be the greatest impediment to the women's career progress. And while many of the companies included in the study were implementing policy changes aimed at improving the retention of women, they were not always the changes that women themselves would have preferred. Companies were opting for enhanced maternity leave and the possibility for career breaks. But both of these provisions required women to resume full-time work on a (linear) career. There were few opportunities for a more gradual return to work, flexibility in working hours or part-time work which many of the women would have preferred.

The search for flexibility was behind the entry of women into residential real estate, as Wharton's (1994) study shows. Wharton describes her research as a case study of the effects of flexible scheduling on the tasks of managing paid and domestic work. The women she interviewed were looking for ways to participate in the labour force without changing their family routines. But in spite of its flexibility, the work required a greater time commitment than many of the women had anticipated. Though they were able to share more household work with their partners, or to hire extra household help, they still carried the burden of responsibility for family matters. Flexibility meant coming home late at night and folding laundry, or fielding business calls while making dinner. Wharton concludes: "I would conjecture that the arrangements described here for balancing careers and families are gender-related. Specifically, they are women's ways of doing both kinds of work" (Wharton, 1994: 204).

The difficulties of balancing work and family responsibilities are being recognized by the business community, as organizations move to implement different types of family programs in the workplace. From the perspective of the organization, the aim of family programs is to make life easier for employees. For example, an article in the Canadian Business Review on "strategic issues" implicated in family-related programs noted that employee satisfaction will translate into a more committed workforce which will result in lower turnover and increased productivity (Potter, 1989). Three types of programs are identified: those which seek directly to facilitate the integration of work and family responsibilities, through such programs as parental leave, flexible hours, and job-sharing, or through the provision of services like workplace day care; programs that extend regular employee benefits to family members; and programs such as relocation counselling for spouses or family-oriented recreation activities, intended to make family members feel that they too are a part of the organization. The first category is likely to have the most impact in terms of helping workers cope with the dual work load, and indeed the organizational literature makes it clear that such programs are designed equally for women and men (Olmsted and Smith, 1989; Hall, 1990; Mikalachki et al, 1991). But there seems little doubt that in most cases it will be women who will make most use of family programs -- particularly those which involve some change in time spent on the job. For example, the 1991 Survey of Work Arrangements in Canada found that mothers are far more likely to change their employment patterns than fathers are, even though the option of flexible working hours represents a small proportion of the change; only 19 per cent of women with preschool children reported working on a flexible schedule (Marshall, 1994). The likelihood that women will make more use of time made available for family needs is also indicated by the fact that women already lose significantly more work time to personal or family responsibilities than men do. In 1993, they missed an average of 6.7 days of work, while men lost just under one day (Akyeampong, 1995).

The other issue which needs to be addressed is the extent to which such programs are available to the people who need them. The 1988 Canadian National Child Care Study found that only 32 per cent of employees with primary childcare responsibilities could work flexible hours; only 24 per cent had employers who permitted job-sharing; and only six per cent had employers who provided workplace child care facilities (Statistics Canada, 1993). A Conference Board of Canada survey of Canadian organizations found that information and referral programs were the favoured forms of parental support, though only 8.4 per cent of companies offered even these (MacBride-King and Paris, 1989).

A much more common strategy for coping with both paid and family work is the choice of part-time paid employment. The extent of the preference, even among full-time workers, for a conversion to part-time work is evident from the results of the 1988 National Child Care Study, which found that 45 per cent of parents with primary childcare responsibilities and employed full-time would have preferred part-time work. But only 53 per cent of the parents in the study (including those currently working part-time) had the option to do so. Much more characteristic was work with little flexibility in terms of scheduling or paid family leave. And as noted earlier, much part-time work is semi-skilled, or deskilled, low-paying and insecure.

Given that the subjects of this research are university graduates, most of whom have established professional careers, the question of *professional* part-time work is especially relevant. As noted earlier, Duffy and Pupo (1992) consider that about one in every five or six part-time jobs can be classified as professional or managerial, and that professional part-time work is becoming more common. They further note that the improved working conditions of "nurses, teachers, social workers, pharmacists, or other professionals" may be attributed at least in part to the strength of their unions or professional associations (Duffy and Pupo, 1992: 146).

The foregoing discussion of employment choices has so far not considered the third option available to women with children, that of withdrawing from formal participation in the paid labour force. While this is clearly not an option for women whose families are dependent on their incomes, it is a possibility for many middle-class women whose financial resources allow it. The National Child Care Study found that in 1988, 45 per cent of children aged less than 18 months were cared for exclusively by a parent,[3] as were 36.5 per cent of those aged between 18 and 35 months.

The care of children at home does not preclude the possibility of paid work being done there, on an informal or intermittent basis. Recent developments in microtechnology have also facilitated work at home (in the form of telecommuting) as a replacement for or supplement to formal full- or part-time employment in a work organization. Indeed, a burgeoning popular literature on home-based work attests to its flexibility and convenience for women who also have childcare responsibilities. An example is Davidson's (1986) book Staying Home Instead, which is sub-titled "How to quit the working-mom rat-race and survive financially." The content of professional women's home-based work -- consulting, researching and writing, and so on -- might well be interesting and complex. But there is little research evidence to suggest exactly how it can be fitted around the constant physical presence of small children.

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[3] The National Child Care Study refers to the "parent with primary childcare responsibility" without specifying gender. On the basis of earlier discussion, however, it seems reasonable to assume that this parent will in most cases be the mother.

Summary

In all of the research on women's choices, there are many unasked questions. Women who choose to remain at home to care for their babies may, as Hock et al (1985) suggest, place a higher value on the maternal role. They may also be unable to find alternative childcare that is affordable and of good quality. Delegation of child care or other household work presupposes someone to whom one can delegate. Housework not done may not be life-threatening (at least not immediately). But pre-school children need focused care and attention for most of their waking hours, and at least basic surveillance at other times.

Duffy, Mandell and Pupo (1989), in their qualitative study of Canadian women's choices regarding work and family, found striking similarities between women working full-time at home, women working full-time in paid employment, and those in part-time paid work. Full-time work was not necessarily an expression of feminist views, nor were full-time "homemakers" necessarily conservative traditionalists. Changing circumstances could propel some of the full-time mothers back into the paid labour force as readily as they could cause full-time employees to spend a period of time at home. The emphasis throughout the study is on the way in which women's "choices" are constrained by social arrangements.

The literature review establishes the extent to which the experiences of the women graduates in this study fit the patterns established by educated women of their age in Canada generally, and in other industrialized countries. Several of these patterns are unambiguous: generally delayed fertility accompanying increased labour force participation, and reduced occupational mobility after childbirth. Also clear, from the studies cited, is the effect of public policy on the labour force participation of mothers. Women make different decisions in different countries: for example, the availability of generous parental benefits and publicly-funded day care in Sweden have contributed to female labour force participation rates much higher than those of Canadian women. And public policy, as the literature review also noted, generally reflects prevailing ideologies of motherhood which further constrain women's work and family lives.

The decisions women make about employment after childbirth, in the light of these constraints, are influenced by several factors, among which occupational choice seems to be key. Several studies confirmed the initial observation of this research that teachers were more likely to return to work after having children. But what it was about teaching particularly that encouraged relatively higher rates of return was not made clear. Nor was it clear whether teaching could be considered a proxy for other female-dominated professions. The ease of conversion to part-time work emerged as a critical factor; the possible effect of unionization on working conditions for women was also raised. But whether other characteristics of the profession or its practitioners were responsible for its attraction was not revealed. In the same vein, the literature pays scant attention to the details of particular occupations which women find incompatible with their family responsibilities, and to which they decide *not* to return. The importance of flexibility, and the difficulty of returning to jobs in organizationally-based internal labour markets, barely begins to account for some of these decisions.

This dissertation will address two main categories of questions which have not been answered by existing studies. The first concerns postponement of childbearing. While postponement per se -- particularly on the part of well-educated women -- has been demonstrated, some women delay having children considerably longer than do others. Variations among educated women in the *length* of the postponement have not been addressed. Existing studies do not examine the career structures which may (or may not) build on particular university degrees, and pursue these career variations as contributors to differentially delayed fertility.

The second category of question to be raised in this research concerns women's employment decisions after childbirth. The fact that women's lives change profoundly after they have children has been clearly shown. That particular career choices have consequences for subsequent employment has also been demonstrated. What is now needed is an understanding of how women synthesize their family lives and their lives in paid employment, and the ways that different kinds of paid employment either facilitate or impede that synthesis.

These questions move the analysis to a different level. The transition to motherhood is a transition which some women avoid, but most women make, on their individual passages through life. Whether they make this particular transition, and how they manage it if they do make it, will shape their futures. The need to understand this transition in the context of a woman's total life course is the basis for the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL APPROACH

The previous chapter described the questions left unanswered by existing research on women's experiences of paid employment and family life. This chapter deals with the assumption that these experiences have to be synthesized, that the different dimensions of women's (people's) lives have to be balanced, and that the process of aging moves us, not only through time but through significant events, shaped for us by everything that has gone before, shaping in their turn everything that is to come.

The life course perspective will be used in this dissertation as a theoretical tool to orient the analysis of one particular significant event -- the transition to motherhood -- in the lives of a select group of women. The life course approach is best understood as a means of viewing the flux and flow of individual lives in a holistic way, as they unfold in the context of family responsibilities, workplace commitments, and all the other obligations of adulthood lived out in local communities and the wider society. It recognizes that individual life courses are constructed "at the intersection of families, educational and social institutions, and labour markets" (Heinz, 1992: 9), and in a particular social and historic context. But it also views life course transitions and changes in work status and family relations as a "life process," rather than as an isolated state or segment of human experience (Hareven, 1982: xiii).

Elder (1978) points out that the course of life experience is most accurately described by temporal constructs that give some sense of the passage through situations and circumstances. The best term our conceptual language offers is "career."

> In its most general sense as an attribute of the individual, career refers to a sequence of activities or roles through social networks and settings. From this vantage point a career line is equivalent to an individual's life history in each role domain, such as marriage, parenthood, consumption and work life (Elder, 1978: 22-23).

Thus individuals can be seen as having several careers that need to be synchronized. These careers are not necessarily structured or orderly, and only sometimes take place in conventional workplaces. Family formation requires further synchronization, since it is at this conjunction of individual lives that individual transitions are linked to family transitions against the broader tapestry of social and historical change. A fundamental assumption of this dissertation, documented in the previous chapter, is that the life course transition to parenthood has a more profound impact on women than on men, because "parenthood" is not a generic, gender-neutral state or set of activities. Women's specific transition is to *motherhood*, and motherhood is much more difficult to synchronize with the employment "career" than *fatherhood*. As well as considering women's lives from a life course perspective, this chapter will also draw on feminist theorizing of motherhood in order to clarify the powerful life course consequences for women of the decision to have children.

Theorizing the life course

Research using a life course approach sees the life course as a *social* phenomenon; it demands a dynamic, longitudinal perspective; and it is fundamentally engaged with the interrelated concepts of transitions and trajectories. Transitions refer to "changes in status that are discrete and bounded in duration," and trajectories are "long-term patterns of stability and change, often including multiple transitions, that can be reliably differentiated from alternate patterns" (George, 1993: 398). Hagestad (1992) identifies two categories of contemporary research that can be clearly identified with the life course approach, and which offer helpful insights into the changes in contemporary women's lives. The first, mainly North American in origin, involves demographic studies of changes in life patterns, using population parameters from different periods, or information from survey research. Many of the longitudinal studies of women's labour force participation and fertility described in the previous chapter are of this type. For example, Robinson's (1986) research on the effect of work interruptions on women's careers used three waves of the Social Change in Canada Survey to demonstrate that work interruptions have a significant and negative effect on women's occupational attainment. Beaujot's (1995) synthesis of Canadian census data allowed him to observe the emergence of delayed fertility patterns among young women.

The second, more interpretive or social-psychological in orientation, examines the "cultural phenomenology of age" -- in other words, how members of different social groups perceive life transitions and trajectories, and construct meaningful biographies of their own life course experiences. Of interest here is Porter's (1991) study of women and work in two Newfoundland fishing towns. On the basis of personal interviews, she found that the women interpreted both their unpaid family work and their (often intermittent and contingent) paid employment in the context of one overall family project. They bridged the gulf between paid work and family work -- and the discontinuity experienced by many other women in similar situations -- by viewing all of it as work for the benefit of their families.

Other studies fall somewhere between these two approaches. Thus for example Spenner and Rosenfeld (1990) use longitudinal survey data to study changes in women's work identities (essentially their motivation for working) over the course of the surveys. Moen and Smith (1986) use longitudinal survey data to study the relationship between the pattern of women's paid employment over a five-year period and their psychological commitment to work.

All these approaches collectively shed light on the shifts and changes in women's lives, and the meanings they derive from the changes. But the methodological differences demonstrated by these diverse approaches also hint at the logically prior problem of how life course research in general should be theorized.

> Although there is general agreement that twists and turns in life pathways reflect the culture and structure of the surrounding social context, much ambiguity remains regarding the nature of such linkages between social structure, culture, group interactions and individual lives . . . After nearly two decades of writing and research in this area, investigators are still struggling to find integration between macro- and microlevel views of lives; between insiders' and outsiders' perspectives; between prospective and retrospective accounts; between patterns of diversity and themes of uniformity (Hagestad, 1990: 152).

The life course perspective inevitably raises questions about whether individuals are free to plot their own trajectories through the multiple transitions of their lives, or whether structural constraints actually limit their freedom to choose their own paths. Ultimately, the theoretical problem is the time-honoured one of judging the competing claims of structure and agency. At one extreme the argument among theorists of the life course is that the progress of modernity has led to a life course structured to the point of institutionalization. At the other extreme are those who see the life course as becoming increasingly a "biographical project" of individual actors in an era in which the structures and institutions of modernity are beginning to fragment.

The structuralist argument is that the well-known concomitants of modernity -- industrialization, rationalization, bureaucratization, the emergence of the welfare state, the shift from communal to individual legal identity -- have led to an institutionalization of the life course into fairly predictable stages based to a large extent on chronological age. The *cause* of this institutionalization is attributed either to the basic change in the mode of production which accompanied industrialization, or to the emergence of the modern state as the key producer of the life course (Kohli and Meyer, 1986). In the former case, the needs of the labour market are seen as preeminent, and give rise to a tripartite life course devoted to education (in preparation for paid employment), working, and retirement. In the latter case, the welfare state is seen as defining and regulating the major life course transitions, for example setting arbitrary ages and standards for education and vocational training, authorizing marriages, and redistributing income. Far from claiming that individuals have any role to play in the construction of the life course, Meyer (1986) goes so far as to state that western societies have also institutionalized the "self." This "self," according to Meyer, is the repository of the ideals of universalism and equality which are in fact *not* reflected in the institutionalized life course as people actually experience it. The self must therefore be institutionally separated from the life course. Modern individuals are "licensed to construct a strong myth of the self" which is "bathed in ultimate universalism and equality" -- but which is also "immunized (with much legitimacy and professional support) from the organized social reality" (Meyer, 1986: 215).

But arguments for institutionalization (and the privileging of structure) are difficult to sustain in the face of demonstrable increases in heterogeneity of life courses. A much more complex working world with enormously diversified employment choices, combined with increased longevity, have combined in recent times to expand the range of possible life course trajectories. Riley (1986) describes this change in terms of increases in structural options and accumulated experience. The logical extension of these claims for increasing life course heterogeneity is that life courses are no longer being structured into a finite number of predictable (and institutionalized) pathways. Instead, the argument is made that people approach their lives "essentially as individuals responsible for and with the freedom to make their own decisions, to *construct their own biographies* on their own account" (Chisholm and Du Bois-Reymond, 1993: 260).

A key theorist of this shift to individualization, particularly in European sociology, is Ulrich Beck (1992), who puts forward his "individuation thesis" in the context of a "risk society." Beck sees contemporary times as the beginning of a new kind of modernity -- modernity beyond its classic industrial design. This new reflexive modernization has at its heart risks and consequences which, unlike the occupational hazards of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, are not limited to particular localities or groups, but are global and human in scale. Inherent in the risks and changes is a crumbling of the social order of the old industrial society. "Feudal" sex roles for men and women begin to crumble; the relationship of production and reproduction begins to shift, "like everything else connected to the industrial 'tradition of the nuclear family': marriage, parenthood, sexuality, love and the like" (Beck, 1992: 13). In short, says Beck, we are experiencing a transformation of the foundations of change. Continuity becomes the "cause" of discontinuity as people are "set free" from the certainties and ways of living of industrial society -- just as the reformation "freed" them from the arms of the Church.

> The system of coordinates in which life and thinking are fastened in industrial modernity -- the axes of gender, family and occupation, the belief in science and progress -- begins to shake, and a new twilight of risks and opportunities and hazards comes into existence -- the contours of the risk society. (Beck, 1992: 15)

Elements of this "individuation thesis" appear also in Giddens' (1991) analysis of "high modernity." Giddens too speaks of the greater prospective risks attendant on contemporary life decisions, as individuals confront a wider range of options and possibilities. It is not the choosing that is novel, however, but the complexity of options available and the absence of advice as to which options should be selected. Giddens rejects the view that the current modern order is becoming fragmented to the point where a new, "postmodern" era is emerging. He argues that the unifying features of modern institutions are just as central to modernity as the disaggregating ones; in fact, globalization has established a single "world" where none existed previously. And he points out also that the fundamental cleavages of inequality continue to work through modern institutions; in some cases, individuals make choices "under conditions of severe material constraint" (Giddens, 1991: 6). Giddens prefers to speak of a post-traditional order, in which the self becomes a *reflexive project*. He points out that transitions in individuals' lives have always required some psychic reorganization, often given ritual recognition in traditional cultures as *rites de passage*. But in such cultures, where "things stayed more or less the same from generation to generation on the level of the collectivity," the changed identity (for example, from adolescence to adulthood) was clear. In conditions of modernity, however, "the altered self has to be explored and constructed as part of a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change" (Giddens, 1991: 33). More specifically, "[t]he reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems" (Giddens, 1991: 5).

This begins to restore the middle ground lost to the competing theoretical claims of the institutionalized and the "individualized" life course. If social structure is not all-constraining, neither do individuals act in total freedom. "Sudden turns" in a life course, which appear to be consequences of individual actions resulting from individual decisions, are not always what they seem. "Seldom will the decision be wholly *of* the person; seldom will it be *only* an anticipation . . . of external circumstances" (Bertaux, 1982: 137). Claims about individual biographies unfolding in particular social contexts -- which they help to shape -- reflect the broader theoretical position occupied by Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) and in fact "owe much" to Giddens' work (Heinz, 1992: 19).

Structuration theory and the life course

Structuration theory is an obvious, and intellectually compelling, theoretical basis for life course research, because it attempts to answer many of the questions, noted earlier by Hagestad, which have been raised by the accumulated empirical research. Most importantly, it addresses directly the problems raised by dualistic approaches to agency and structure of the kind described above.

In brief, structuration theory posits a knowledgeable actor, and a view of "structure" which is not external to human action, but embedded in it. Giddens defines structures as rules and resources organized as properties of social systems, which in turn are "reproduced relations between actors or collectivities." Structuration refers to "the conditions governing the continuity or transmutation of structures, and therefore the reproduction of social systems." Crucial to the idea of structuration is the "theorem of the duality of structure," which constitutes agents and structures not as two independent sets of phenomena, but a duality, such that "the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize." Seen in this light, structure is not external to individuals: as existing in the memory (rules), as exemplified in practices, structure is in many ways internal (Giddens, 1984: 25). Human actors/agents are knowledgeable in the sense that they know what they do in their daily activities, and structure has no existence independent of this knowledge. But knowledge is also bounded; actors may *not* know about the ramifications of their daily activities, which, though intentional, may have unintended consequences. In other words, day-to-day activities may reach beyond the repetition of "dailiness." Actors' own theories of the social systems they help constitute may also reify those systems. This reification is a "naturalization" of social relations which is a major dimension of ideology in social life (Giddens, 1984: 25-26).

Giddens considers the "fundamental question of social theory" is to explain how the limitations of individual "presence" are overcome by the "'stretching' of social relations across time and space." He distinguishes between the *duree* of day-to-day experience, which has a flow but in which "time is constituted only in repetition"; the life of the individual, finite and irreversibly leading towards death; and the *longue duree* of institutional time (Giddens, 1984: 35). It is not the case that the routines of daily life are the "foundation" of institutional forms of social organization as they are created in time and space. It is rather that they constitute each other, and both enter into the constitution of the actor. "All social systems, no matter how grand or far-flung, both express and are expressed in the routines of daily social life, mediating the physical and sensory properties of the human body" (Giddens, 1984: 36).

Another way in which human knowledge is bounded is by the "positioning" of actors in (social) space. A social position requires the specification of an identity within a network of social relations, and to which particular normative sanctions apply. Giddens cites age (or age grade) and gender as common constituents of identity in most societies, and notes that the rules related to social positioning usually involve the specification of rights and obligations. The fact that all actors move in situated contexts limits their knowledge of other contexts about which they have no first-hand experience.

Limited or "bounded" knowledge, and rules for social positions, suggest restrictions on the actor's freedom to act, a freedom which Giddens equates with power. Power in fact involves the freedom to be able to "act otherwise," to be able to "intervene in the world" (or refrain from intervening) and in so doing to influence some state of affairs or process. Power as the ability to "act otherwise" leads directly to Giddens' understanding of the nature of structural constraint. Structures, he emphasizes, are enabling as well as constraining. For example, the capitalist labour contract is weighted heavily in favour of employers rather than workers. But, once propertyless, workers are dependent on employers' resources, and benefit from the contract -- though not to anything like the extent that employers do. On the other hand, structural *constraint* is best described as *"placing limits upon the range of options open to an actor, or plurality of actors, in a given circumstance or type of circumstance"* (Giddens, 1984: 177). But even in situations where actors "have no choice", they are still actors. Choosing the only available option still leaves open the possibility of *not* choosing that option; "having no choice" is, for Giddens, *not* to be equated with the dissolution of action.

Women, theory and life course research

Structuration theory addresses the claims for both an institutionalized life course and an "individuated" life course by seeing them in terms of options available for choice and action: if the life course is institutionalized, there are few action choices available; if the life course is individualized, there are multiple choices open. It also allows for the possibility that certain actors, by virtue of their social position(ing) or limited knowledge, are more constrained in their options for action. They have, in Giddens' terms, less power. That gender is a basis for social positioning, and that women may in consequence be more constrained in their action choices, is something that structuration theory acknowledges. Indeed, in his later work on "high modernity," Giddens is explicit on this subject. He points out that, although the period makes available a plurality of options, they are generated by a social universe which continues to exclude women from full participation.

> Women today have the nominal opportunity to follow a whole variety of possibilities and chances: yet, in a masculinist culture, many of these avenues remain effectively foreclosed (Giddens, 1991: 106).

This acknowledgement is instructive, in the light of considerable research and theorizing on the life course which does not seem to take gender into account. For example, an institutionalized life course defined in terms of participation in the labour market does not represent the life experience of many women whose labour market participation may have been interrupted by periods of home-based childrearing, and who may never officially "retire." In fact, the notion of the institutionalization of the life course, organized around educational institutions and paid work, "shares with much of stratification theory the problem of the 'invisible woman'" (Held, 1986: 159). For women outside the labour market, perhaps especially mothers, "the modern life-course recipes fail," and the (institutionalized) response to those who do *not* conform to institutionalized life course patterns is to devise strategies to help them fit in (Meyer, 1986: 212). So, for example, middle-aged women who have been out of the paid labour force might be offered programs to ease their transition to paid work. The institutionalized life course is viewed as normative, and non-conformists are marginalized. This is not to say, of course, that there are not clear assumptions about what the life course of women *does* comprise. The female life course has been subjected to a standardization of its own, based on the assumption that women's family roles will effectively remove them from participation in the public sphere.

But whether or not women, particularly mothers, are removed from public participation, it has also not escaped some researchers that women's family roles make their lives more contingent on the lives of their partners and children (Held, 1986; Sorensen, 1991). Hagestad (1992) points out that for many women, days and lives are still largely organized by tasks and activities which appear as "inescapable givens." Women give their time to others by doing the work of meeting people's needs.

> An existence in which responding to the needs of others is central means that one cannot make firm plans, but has to assume. . . a *contingency* orientation, a readiness to live with a lack of predictability and closure (Hagestad, 1992: 270).

The extent to which many women's lives are organized around the lives of others also makes them unlikely candidates for freely constructing their own biographies. This is not to say that, in many cases, a woman's life course will not be, in true postmodern form, individualized, unpredictable, and risky. Indeed, as Hagestad has suggested, this is nothing new for many women. Contingency invites unpredictability and risk. The distinction which needs to be made is between individualization, which may well be happening in women's lives (as, for example, Jones et al, 1990, describe) and the freedom to direct the course of that individualization. Chisholm and Du Bois-Reymond (1993) note that "critical modernization" theories of the type articulated by Beck predicted individualized life courses and a shift in the balance of power between women and men. Yet in their study of the work aspirations and life plans of teenage girls in Holland and the U.K., they found few signs of a weakening of the gender specificity of the girls' plans. Most of them envisaged subordinating their paid work to family obligations, even though they clearly sought a balance between the two. The researchers conclude that the democratization of risks which is at the heart of theories like Beck's is precisely that which "masks those relations of social inequality of which gender is but one, if important, example" (Chisholm and Du Bois-Reymond, 1993: 273).

Women's and men's lives

Giddens' statement, cited above, that a masculinist culture such as ours precludes full participation by women, may be taken as axiomatic. Patriarchal social structures, again in Giddens' terms, limit women's choices and their power. The outcomes of this constraint, played out in gender-segregated workplaces, male-biased wage structures and inequitably divided household labour, have been extensively documented. From the perspective of the life course, the question to be asked is *how* gender works to shape it.

For people like those who are the core of this research -- well-educated, middle-class women -- the answer is not immediately apparent. Until they approach their 30s, these women live lives that, on the face of it, are very like the lives of their male counterparts. They receive the same quality of education, for about the same length of time, graduate from university and get jobs. Many also form serious relationships or marry, as men do -- and in only a few cases does marriage itself interrupt their working lives. Leaving aside the fact that their educational and occupational choices, though expanding, are still more limited than those of men, leaving aside also the fact that their experiences both on the job and in their relationships are likely to reflect in some way the patriarchal structures in which they are constituted, the broad outlines of their lives look the same as men's. The paths begin to diverge, however, when the women have children -- and once begun, the divergence tends to be sharp, and irreversible. Its most obvious manifestations, for professional women, are interrupted work careers, a greatly increased share of household work, and near-complete responsibility, in a psychic if not physical sense, for childrearing.

The fact that it is *motherhood* that so alters the trajectories of women's lives bears closer scrutiny, because this was not always the case. Crouch and Manderson (1993) point out that when pregnancy was expected to follow closely after marriage, and childlessness was the lot of "spinsters" or "barren" women, marriage was the significant transition. Now, however, the transition to motherhood is more a matter of choice -- in principle, at least, since in fact most women do have children. The possibility of choice, combined with the increasing possibility that women who are neither married nor heterosexual may choose to have children, reinforces the claim for motherhood as the critical transition. Why it should so radically transform women's lives is at the heart of ongoing, and polemical, theoretical debate.

Theorizing motherhood

In order to understand why motherhood in western industrial societies seems to compromise women's participation in paid employment, it is necessary to consider the terms of women's admission to the contemporary working world in the first place. The separation of workplace and home which accompanied industrialization corresponded to the dominant, patriarchal mode of rational, "enlightened" dichotomous thought in which workplace and home came to represent "public" and "private" dimensions of social life, corresponding inevitably to other dichotomous divisions -- cultural-natural, intellectual-emotional, work-family, male-female -- which established both the identity of the key players in each domain and the kinds of activities they would perform there. Retrieving women from the private sphere of family and domestic concerns, and winning them access to the public world of paid work, was a cornerstone of second-wave feminist activism of the 1960s and 1970s. Its goal, in accordance with liberal philosophy, was to make women citizens -- in other words, full participants of the public sphere.

The fact that women's experiences of paid work were (and continue to be) significantly different from men's has also been extensively researched. Pervasive job segregation by gender, "sex-typing" of jobs (with women's jobs invariably awarded lower pay and status), the organization of much women's work into "dead-end" or entry-level jobs and the devaluation of skill in most jobs done by women have all been identified as problems, and a variety of theoretical explanations put forward to account for them. Women's generally subordinate status in paid employment has been attributed to their reduced attachment to the work force and their failure to invest in the appropriate human capital, namely education and training (Mincer and Polachek, 1974); to segmented labour markets (Gordon et al, 1982; Garnsey et al, 1985); and more generally to gender socialization. Feminist theorists have more directly isolated the source of women's subordination in the workplace as part of a more general oppression of women by patriarchal structures of social organization (Hartmann, 1976; Acker, 1988; Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983).

What feminists have now discovered, however, is that women were only ever admitted to the male-dominated public sphere as "conceptual men." In order to have equal rights they had to suppress their biological, *bodily* differences and participate on men's terms in an "unchanged male hegemony" (Snitow, 1990: 26). The abstract "worker" whose ranks women sought to join was actually a man, with a male body. In most work organizations, women's bodies are stigmatized, and used as a basis for exclusion and control. Women respond by concealing evidence of their bodily differences, as well as any ongoing connection to the private sphere (Acker, 1990; Cockburn, 1991; Martin, 1992). But all this breaks down with the vividly embodied reality of pregnancy.

> In pregnancy, the private self, the sexual familial self, announces itself wherever we go. Motherhood is the embodied challenge to liberal philosophy. . . (Rothman, 1994: 146).

The undeniable bodily evidence of motherhood, based on gendered reproductive capacity, seems to be the rock on which notions of equality founder. Men cannot be mothers. Therefore mothers cannot be conceptual men. Thus motherhood is the core, "natural" difference which distinguishes women from men, and it is a difference from which certain logical consequences seem to flow. Women's exclusive biological capacity to bear children has come to be generalized to an exclusive capacity to care for them; mothering, also, has been subject to essentialist interpretations. For most of the twentieth century, a model of motherhood (based heavily on the situation of the white, middle-class family) has been projected as universal. This model establishes one woman (the biological mother) as primarily responsible for mothering during her children's formative years, with the children constructed reciprocally as needing her constant and exclusive care (Glenn, 1994; Wearing, 1984). This ideological conflation of the *bearing* and the *raising* of children, and the assumption that mothers are naturally best suited to do both, has vast implications for women. It exerts a powerful social control by defining -- and sentimentalizing -- motherhood as the epitome of femininity while ensuring that its activities remain confined to the private world, unsupported by any contribution from the public domain and its (male) inhabitants (Crouch and Manderson, 1993; O'Barr, Pope and Wyer, 1990; Rossiter, 1988).

This dominant view of motherhood has serious practical consequences for the individual women whose lived experience of motherhood may belie the ideological prescription. It is also deeply significant for women who are *not* mothers. If motherhood is seen as the core of femininity, then all women, mothers or not, are forced to define themselves in its terms (O'Barr, Pope and Wyer, 1990; Trebilcot, 1983). But it is also a problem for feminist theorists who are dispersed on either side of a divide in terms of their perceptions of gender difference. The conflict has a historical basis. Opposition to the dominant ideology from the liberal feminists of the 1960s was premised on the belief that motherhood as an institution was socially constructed, not biologically determined, and that women should for all practical purposes be considered equal to men. But activism against the forces of pronatalism seemed to deny the genuine desire of many women to have children. This desire, by the 1980s, had become a "resonant theme" in feminist scholarship (Blum, 1993). From denying the importance of biological difference, cultural feminists of the 1980s and later have embraced and celebrated it.

Claims from both sides are strong. Phillips (1987) notes that advocates of stricter equality argue the dangers of admitting even a small degree of biologically based difference. On the one hand, if women ever conceded that premenstrual tension might interfere with concentration, that pregnancy could be exhausting, that motherhood was often absorbing, they would be "off down the slope to separate spheres." On the other hand, as proponents of a feminism based on gender difference claim, the politics of equality directs energy to sites occupied by men, while the predominantly female activities of domestic work and childcare remain obscured from view (Phillips, 1987: 19). Finally, fear of biological essentialism cannot change the fact that "there really is biology" (Riley, 1983: 2). The theoretical divide between "equality" and "difference" represents a fundamental contradiction: women are being asked to be women, and also not women (Snitow, 1990).

Bridging the gap requires a closer scrutiny of the nature of "difference". And since motherhood has already been isolated as its prime manifestation, mothers are the focus of much of this work. Somewhere between the accounts of motherhood in strictly social terms (for example, Chodorow, 1976) and in strictly biological terms (for example, Rich, 1986), or even "biosocial" terms (for example, Rossi, 1977) lies a middle ground which seeks to consider motherhood, at least in some of its dimensions, as an embodied (and therefore gendered) experience without lapsing into biological essentialism. This perspective involves acknowledging that pregnancy, childbirth and lactation are physical, bodily experiences unique to women, and which shape women's practices in the *work* of mothering. But even if this shaping is a predisposition to behave towards a newborn in a particular way, behaviour is made up of practices which occur in a social context and which are discursively organized. The social context in which these practices take place, and the ideological discourse which organizes them, is far more constraining than the predisposition. Implicit in this approach is the intentional separation of childbearing (as experience) and childrearing (as work).

This approach is exemplified in Whitbeck's (1983) analysis of the so-called maternal instinct. Whitbeck claims that parental affection or attachment is influenced by experience, notably bodily experiences that are the same cross-culturally. In other words, all women have experiences that are likely to enhance those feelings that generally induce people to care for their infants. Thus there is a factual basis for the different expressions we reserve for maternal affection. But this doesn't mean that women have a "maternal instinct." Women's bodily experiences "enhance rather than augment" feelings which are common to parents of either sex (Whitbeck, 1983: 191).

Several writers (Everingham, 1994; Rossiter, 1988;

Ruddick, 1983) speak of the work, most often done by mothers of newborns, of "learning the baby":

> Mothering involves listening, trial and error learning, changing one's rhythm, working simultaneously at different levels, uncertainty and physical exhaustion . . . suspending one's own identity to momentarily "be" the baby in order to understand her needs, dissolving one's boundaries to admit a different rhythm, thinking with a constant sub-thought of "baby" (Rossiter, 1988: 244).

The kind of practice described by Rossiter becomes what Ruddick (1983) has called "maternal thinking." The mother, Ruddick claims, engages in a discipline. Like anyone so engaged -- a scientist, for example -- she will perform more or less competently, more or less enthusiastically. But her engagement commits her to certain practices (preservation of life, encouragement of growth, socialization for acceptability in society). Achievement in these areas requires her to develop a capacity -- attention -- and a virtue -- love -- which are the core of maternal thought.

It should be clear by now that, even if its origins are in women's biology and socialization, maternal thinking is a social practice in which men, and women other than biological mothers, can engage. But maternal thought is the discipline which guides the collection of practices called mothering. Men *can* also mother, and more of them are doing so (Laqueur, 1990; Rothman, 1994; Ruddick, 1990). [1] Why then do most of them not do so? A major reason seems to lie in structural constraints which set mothers up as sole caregivers. In the situation of young middle-class women like those studied here, the explanation might be as simple as the fact that it is these women whose prior paid employment qualifies them for maternity leave, and whose family finances allow them to stay out of paid employment for extended periods beyond that. Their early experience as mothers takes place in a home in which the only other adult is gone all day long, and in which, as a consequence, the important work of "learning the baby" cannot be shared. When only one parent is home, only one parent "learns the baby." Reciprocally, only one parent comes to be known by the baby -- a knowledge which often leads to a preferential attachment on the baby's part. One parent, usually the mother, becomes the expert on the baby, setting up a cycle in which her increasing competence and confidence ensure her position as primary caregiver becomes more and more deeply entrenched (Rossiter, 1988; Crouch and Manderson, 1993; Wearing, 1984).

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[1] This term is used advisedly. Conventional usage gives very different meanings to "mothering" and "fathering." The more generic "parenting" suggests a more egalitarian division of child-tending work than actually exists (Peterson, 1984;

The solution, for most of the writers of the "middle ground," is to have the mothering shared, preferably with the people who share the mother's (and the baby's) life. But this is proposed not merely to free mothers for greater public participation in the public sphere (although that could be one of its effects). The point rather is to recognize that what is

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Ruddick, 1990).

done in the private sphere is valuable -- not merely for its contribution to capitalism through the reproduction of workers, as the domestic labour debate of the 1970s sought to demonstrate, but in absolute, or perhaps moral terms. Mothering, in this view, is transformative, and men -- and the public sphere which they inhabit -- need transformation in the interests of "human and planetary survival" (Maroney, 1985: 59).

This so-called solution actually evades several difficult questions. The dichotomous domains of public and private life are not as disconnected in real life as they are in theory (Snitow, 1990; Everingham, 1994). And to speak of the transformative effects of mothering is to risk essentialism of another kind. Mothering is not always transformative; sometimes it ends badly. But there is something about mothering as a practice that makes it different from work in the labour market. Indeed, even when childcare is done for payment, as in Nelson's (1990) study, those who do it see themselves as more like mothers than paid professionals. Devault's (1987) study of people (mainly women) engaged in feeding families found they spoke of what they did -- creating a pleasant atmosphere for a meal, remembering food preferences, juggling competing schedules to time the meal -- as something other than work in the conventional sense. Vocabularies of work come from the models of paid employment; because they lack the words to describe their activities, "these women talk of their work at home in terms of 'love'" (Devault, 1987: 180). In the sense it has been described here, mothering is both more than labour and more than love (Glenn, 1994).

The theoretical middle ground described here sees mothering as a series of practices influenced by biology but more significantly shaped by the social context in which they are carried out. A key constituent of the social context is the capitalist workplace, which continues to resist penetration by such practices because they are qualitatively different from the practices of paid employment. Capitalism requires the priority of paid employment over the care of children, and children continue to be invisible at work (Rossiter, 1988). The theoretical bridging required between opposing understandings about women as mothers (equality *and* difference, rather than equality *or* difference) corresponds to the bridge that is clearly required -- both in theory and in practice -- between mothering and paid employment. The alternative is "an inescapable, irreducible 'doubleness' -- a word that crops up everywhere in feminist discussion" (Snitow, 1990: 19). So for example Smith (1987) speaks of her own experience (as an academic, and also the single mother of young children) as a "double life" characterized by two forms of consciousness which could not coexist with one another:

> In practice of course they existed in the same person, often in the same places, and certainly they often competed with one another for time. But moving from one to the other was a real shift, involving a different organization of memory, attention, relevances and objectives, and indeed different presences. (Smith, 1987: 7).

Mothering and the life course

The *doubleness* metaphor appears repeatedly in studies of the life course also, as researchers grapple with ways to understand the effects of women's life course transitions. If the foregoing has established why it is *motherhood* that has such profound effects, the task remains to understand how bifurcated consciousness and a "double life" can be resolved into one life course biography, coherent at both the theoretical and the personal level. Many of the issues raised by feminist theorists striving to understand motherhood reappear as problems for theorists attempting to bridge women's paid work and family work from a life course perspective.

Thus Hareven's (1977) discussion of the need for life course research to bridge individual time, historical time and family time links to Hagestad's (1992) analysis of the different rhythms of paid work and family work. Men and women are assumed to be similarly subjected to the rhythms of the workplace. But in fact women's closer involvement in the family domain may make their basic time orientations different from those of men. Geissler and Kruger (1992) refer to "script dilemmas" of women who lack the terms to describe their lives. Geissler and Kruger found, in research on women's life courses, that older women, reflecting on lives in which intermittent paid work punctuated the ongoing work of home and family care, chose to describe themselves, albeit reluctantly, as "housewives" because it was a recognizably continuous designation. The majority of younger women in the study, with their adult lives before them, were looking for continuity in both work and family domains -- a prospect which, according to the researchers, "does not fit with any institutionalized life course pattern at all," because the work and family domains still differ in terms of "structural logic" and expectations for behaviour. In fact, the young women proposed to achieve continuity in both work and family spheres by personally constructing as "continuous" a working life they proposed to interrupt with family breaks. Geissler and Kruger refer to the "new social norm of the 'double life'" to describe this orientation to work and family (Geissler and Kruger, 1992: 161).

Saraceno (1991) speaks of the concept of "dual presence" or "dual membership" developed by Italian women scholars to examine the "complex strategies and self-definitions of women today." Women, says Saraceno, have become "citizens of two worlds," with two roles in two interrelated, yet separate, social systems. According to Saraceno's research, different cohorts develop different forms of this "dual presence." For women in their mid-forties, for example, paid work had an intermittent but important role in which the balancing of competing demands and loyalties was achieved by the caring, human services professions they entered. For women in their mid-thirties, more continuous labour force participation was accompanied by lower fertility; for these women the dual presence did not necessarily threaten "the women's own identity and integrity" (Saraceno, 1991: 514-516).

Summary and prospect: Towards a feminist theory of the life course

The life course perspective which has been discussed in this chapter has drawn attention to the significance of transitions in people's lives, and the ways in which they are contingent on particular social and historical circumstances. But much life course theorizing is also inadequate to explain the particular trajectories of many women's lives. The bridging of paid work and family responsibilities is, for many women, a matter of limited options, choices made under considerable constraint, and daily practices which merely perpetuate the constraints. More helpful as a theory to explain the way many women's lives unfold is Giddens' structuration theory, which allows us to see power in terms of available options, and oppressive structures constituted in people's everyday activities.

The life course perspective could also not explain, although it could demonstrate, the profound effects of *motherhood* on women's lives. Feminist theorizing of motherhood yields an understanding of motherhood both as the core of the patriarchal image of femininity (and therefore central to all women, mothers or not), and also as a set of particular practices. These practices, which can be done by anyone who tends children, are "more than labour and more than love." They are at odds with the practices and values of the capitalist workplace. This workplace casts a long shadow: not only do women and men make choices under the constraints it imposes, but they also allow it to dictate what they value. Many women lack the vocabulary to describe their lives, if those lives are not lived fully through the workplace. The contradictions between workplaces and families, in terms of practices and values, create practical problems for family members, particularly women, and also theoretical dilemmas for feminist and life course theorists. The image of the "double life" is used by both groups to deal with the problem many women face in bridging paid work and family domains.

But the pervasiveness of this "double" imagery as a means to synthesize women's work and family responsibilities begins to look like a means of institutionalizing the differences between them as irreconcilable. Resolving the problem of bridging the two different sets of demands is left to women themselves, and they achieve it by dividing themselves in two.

This is no solution, either for the theoretical problem or for the woman trying to lead a double life. The practical solution is to share some of the constituents of the "double life," particularly some of the responsibility for child care and other family work. Sorensen (1991) argues that in an aging society like ours, characterized by a high life expectancy, particularly for women, and low fertility, the economic demand for women's labour may provide opportunities to develop more egalitarian gender relations. But, Sorensen cautions, these opportunities will never be realized without the fulfilment of one central condition -- that "the link between gender and responsibility for the care and upbringing of children be broken" (Sorensen, 1991: 47).[2]

The theoretical solution would be a feminist theory of the life course which would critically examine major transitions -- like the transition to motherhood -- from the perspective of the women making the transition. To a great extent, this would involve recognizing, as Smith (1987) suggests, what is problematic about the "everyday world" of a range of different women. It would involve recognizing women's agency in making choices about their own lives as individuals, no matter how constrained their choices might be. Finally, and most importantly, it would attend to the sources of meaning and continuity in women's lives.

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[2] Sorensen sees two possible scenarios: the disappearance of a "womanly" and a "manly" life course and the emergence of a more androgynous version which would resemble the life course of today's career-oriented woman; or the continued existence of two separate life courses, one oriented to home and the other to the workplace, but with both women and men equally like to choose either.

It is this theoretical approach which informs the research to be described in the chapters to follow. A particular theoretical goal is to critically examine the "double life" metaphor in terms of its relevance for the women in the study. The question to be asked is whether the problems of bridging work and family responsibilities can be described in any other terms.

To conclude: The previous chapter identified gaps in the empirical research on women's experiences of paid work and the transition to motherhood, and raised questions which this study will address. This chapter has identified some gaps in our theorizing of women's lives, particularly in our understanding of the way many women synthesize their work and family "careers." It outlines the theoretical approach which informs the research described in the following chapters.

This research derives from a larger study of the transition from school to work of a cohort of university graduates: their working lives have been a major focus of the larger study, and the workplace continues to be a backdrop to this project. Here the focus is on women graduates and the ways their lives are shaped by their experiences of paid work and their decisions about having, and rearing, children. A particular interest, given the theoretical discussion just concluded, is the issue of bridging -- two "spheres", two contradictory sets of practices, by one person, and in days that are still only 24 hours long. Given that one strategy to solve the bridging problem is to circumvent it (by not having children) the particular dilemmas and choices of a small group of childless women are also considered.

The discussion so far has indicated a need for information from women about how they make the decision to have -- or not to have -- children, how their working lives affect that decision, how they feel children should be cared for, and how those feelings link to their decisions about paid employment. There is also a need to understand, at a theoretical level, how women themselves describe and make sense of their lives, whether those lives are "double lives," whether they feel they even have "lives of their own" (Jones et al, 1990).

The next chapter describes the research design and methodology used in the present study, and begins to paint the picture of the women whose decisions and experiences regarding work and family are the basis of the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The previous chapters have raised specific questions, unanswered in other studies, about the relationship between occupational choice and work history, and decisions about having and raising children. They have also drawn attention to problems in existing theoretical approaches to the life course for women. The need for data to illuminate both the empirical and the theoretical questions motivated the present research. Since the impetus for this study came from some of the data obtained from the Youth Employment Study conducted by Dr. Harvey Krahn and Dr. Graham S. Lowe through the Population Research Laboratory at the University of Alberta's Department of Sociology, and since the women whose experiences are described in the chapters to follow were participants, it is necessary to begin discussion of the present research with a description of that study.

The Youth Employment Study

The Youth Employment Study began in 1985 to investigate the transition from school to work among a cohort of high school and university graduates. The study was designed as a multi-sample, comparative, longitudinal panel survey. The first four waves of the survey (in 1985, the baseline year; 1986; 1987 and 1989) involved a three-city sample (Edmonton, Sudbury and Toronto). The final survey, in 1992, followed up only the Edmonton respondents (Krahn and Lowe, 1993b). Because the interest of the present research involves only the Edmonton university graduates, what follows refers only to this segment of the larger survey.

Research design

The original Edmonton university graduate sample was drawn from a list of names and addresses of students eligible for graduation in the spring of 1985 from the five largest faculties at the University of Alberta. The selected faculties were arts, business, education, engineering and science. Professional faculties such as law, medicine and dentistry were omitted because of small enrolments, and because their graduates would enter smaller, highly specialized job markets. A systematic sample was then generated by the choice of every third name on each faculty's list. An initial response rate of 64 per cent to the first mailed survey, combined with a decision to omit from the study students born before 1955, yielded a sample of 589 graduands, 289 of them women, for future follow-up. The respondents who remained in the survey completed a total of five mailed questionnaires, which asked comprehensive questions about their labour market experience, as well as their family circumstances, gender attitudes, leisure pursuits and other topics.

Description of the sample

The original university sample had a pronounced middle-class bias, to be expected from university students. A majority of the group had fathers in professional or managerial occupations, and less than four per cent of either fathers or mothers were unemployed (Krahn et al, 1985).

The 185 women university graduates who participated in every wave of the survey, and who were thus its survivors in 1992, represented 64 per cent of the original sample of women. The relatively high rate of attrition in the sample must be addressed, since attrition bias might be expected to distort results. Krahn and Mosher (1992) examined attrition in the survey up to and including the 1989 wave. In general, they found significantly higher retention rates of women than of men respondents. This might have serious implications for other studies involving both men and women. Here, however, the knowledge that more women than men have stayed in the study serves to qualify the effects of attrition bias calculated for the total population of university graduates.

Table 1 indicates sources of attrition bias for the Edmonton university graduates up to and including the 1989 survey. No attrition bias was observed on the basis of respondents' age or marital status. But faculty of graduation was a significant source: the lowest survival rate (56 per cent) occurred among the science graduates, compared to 67 per cent for arts, 68 per cent for business, 73 per cent for

TABLE 1: Attrition bias to 1989*

Sex	.039
Age	.472
Married/common law	.745
Faculty	.032
Grades last year (4 categories)	.088
Paying job while in school	.035
Ever unemployed	.967
Parents' finances (3 categories)	.563
Father's job (man/prof. vs other)	.050
Father's education (4 categories)	.052
Respondent generally has enough money (3 categories)	.034
Born in Canada	.000
Language at home (English vs other)	.001

* Significance levels (p) reported for chi-square tests: stayed in study or not by variables described above.

Source: Krahn, Harvey and Clay Mosher
1992 The Transition From School to Work in Three Canadian Cities, 1985-89: Research Design and Methodological Issues. Population Research Laboratory, Department of Sociology, University of Alberta. (Page 17).

education and 74 per cent for engineering. There was some variation in retention rates according to self-reported grades: 73 per cent of respondents with A grades, compared to 59 per cent of those with below C grades. Graduates who had worked while attending university during the 1984-85 school year were significantly more likely to remain in the survey than those who had not worked (71 per cent compared to 63 per cent). Those with professional/managerial fathers were less likely (64 per cent) to have remained in the study, compared to other groups (71 per cent). The relationship between fathers' education and retention in the study also approached significance, and was curvilinear: 67 per cent of those whose fathers had some high school, 70 per cent of those whose fathers were high school graduates, 75 per cent of those whose fathers had some university, and 60 per cent of those whose fathers were university graduates remained in the study in 1989. A significant (and curvilinear) relationship existed between respondents' own financial situation and retention: those reporting below-average finances (60 per cent) and above average finances (62 per cent) were less likely to have responded in 1989. Finally, Canadian-born respondents, and those whose language at home was English, were significantly more likely to have remained in the study to 1989.

Overall, up to the 1989 survey, the loss of science graduates is significant. Otherwise, on the basis of retention rates for the variables just noted, the group remaining in the survey may as a whole have achieved somewhat higher grades, may be somewhat more likely to have worked through university, and may represent the middle range on other socioeconomic variables. Given however the middle-class bias of the original university sample, the variations in response rates noted above are actually variations within a very narrow range. It should also be noted that the overall response rate for the 1992 survey was 91 per cent of the 1989 respondents; it seems safe to assume that no new sources of attrition bias were introduced with the final survey. Finally, it is also important to remember that retention rates throughout the study were higher for women than for men. This higher retention rate remained through the 1992 study also, with almost 92 per cent of the 1989 women respondents remaining in the study, compared to 90 per cent of the men. Thus the attrition bias calculated for the group as a whole, while not in any case likely to introduce major bias in the data, is in fact probably even less significant for the women respondents, since fewer of them left the study. In other words, the women university graduates who remained in the survey through all five waves, even though constituting only 64 per cent of the original group, seem to be generally representative of the original group for several important variables.

The calculation of attrition bias, however, works on the basis of comparison with baseline data, gathered for the total sample in the first, baseline year of the study. Many important baseline characteristics -- for example, faculty of graduation and grades, socioeconomic status of parents -- are fixed. But other baseline characteristics -- for example, marital status, presence of children, and employment status -- change over time. It would be difficult if not impossible to calculate the effect that such status changes might have on respondents' willingness to remain in the study. For the purposes of the present research, a particular concern is the effect of the presence of children on retention rate. Given that the burden of childcare, as documented in Chapter 2, falls most heavily on women, and that this is a significant burden for women in full-time paid employment, it could be argued that women might be less willing to devote time to participation in the survey once they have children. In other words, the proportion of women in the 1992 study who were raising children might underrepresent the proportion of the baseline sample who were raising children by 1992. It might particularly underrepresent the proportion of women raising children and working full-time outside the home.

The fact that this might be the case is obliquely supported by a comparison with the sample of graduate *men*, on whom the time constraints of children might not be so extreme. In other words, there seems no reason to expect a high drop-out for fathers. The men in the sample are the same average age as the women. Given that the cultural expectation is for men to marry somewhat younger women, we might expect to see a gender gap in the numbers raising children, with *fewer* fathers than mothers. In fact, in 1992, 34 per cent of the men were raising children, compared to 31 per cent of the women. On the other hand, as Chapter 2 also noted (Gee, 1986) it is well-educated women who are most prone to delay childbearing: all the women in the sample are university graduates, but that is unlikely to be the case for the partners of the men in the sample. But the fact also remains that according to 1991 census data, about 40 per cent of women aged 25 to 29 with a university education had at least one child (Ravanera, 1995). On balance, there might be some cause for concern that the presence of children is a source of attrition.

With these concerns in mind, then, it is now possible to consider the characteristics of the 185 women graduates who are the basis of this research. In 1992 they were on average 30 years old, and 70 per cent of them were married or were living with a partner. Of particular interest for this study, as noted above, were the numbers of women who were raising children by 1992, their faculties of origin, and their employment decisions at the time of the 1992 survey. A description of the sample on the basis of these variables is found in Tables 2, 3 and 4. Briefly, as Table 2 shows, only 31 per cent of the women (N=57) were raising children. Of these, 68 per cent (N=39) were education graduates. In fact 47 per cent of all the education graduates in the sample had children by 1992, compared to 18 per cent of graduates from other faculties. The presence of children was also related to the women's employment status, as shown in Table 3. Of the women without children, 79 per cent had full-time paying jobs, nine per cent worked part-time and only 12 per cent were not in the paid labour force. Of the women with children, 53 per cent worked full-time, 21 per cent worked part-time and 26 per cent were not in the paid labour force. For the women with children, the education graduates (most of whom went on to become elementary school teachers) were more likely to be working full-time, as Table 4 shows. Some 80 per cent of education graduates with children were working full-time or part-time; only about 20 per cent were not in the paid labour force. Though the numbers of graduates from other faculties with children are very small, 59 per cent had full- or part-time paid employment, while 41 per cent were not in the paid labour force.

TABLE 2: Presence of children by faculty of graduation (1992)

	Education	Arts	Business	Engineering	Science	All
No	44 (53%)	42 (82%)	23 (85%)	5 (83%)	14 (78%)	128 (69%)
Yes	39 (47%)	9 (18%)	4 (15%)	1 (17%)	4 (22%)	57 (31%)
	83 (100%)	51 (100%)	27 (100%)	6 (100%)	18 (100%)	185 (100%)

TABLE 3: Employment status by presence of children (1992)

	No	Yes	All
Full-time paying job	100 (79%)	28 (53%)	128 (71%)
Part-time paying job	11 (9%)	11 (21%)	22 (12%)
Not in paid labour force	16 (12%)	14 (26%)	30 (17%)
	127 (100%)	53 (100%)	180 (100%)

TABLE 4: Employment status of women with children, by faculty of graduation (1992)

	Education	Arts	Business	Engineering	Science	All
Full-time paying job	22 (61%)	2 (22%)	1 (33%)	1 (100%)	2 (50%)	28 (53%)
Part-time paying job	7 (19%)	3 (33%)	-	-	1 (25%)	11 (21%)
Not in paid labour force	7 (19%)	4 (44%)	2 (66%)	-	1 (25%)	14 (26%)
	36 *[100%]	9 *[100%]	3 *[100%]	1 (100%)	4 (100%)	53 (100%)

*=with rounding

The dissertation research

The characteristics of the 1992 women graduate respondents, as described above, raised important questions which prompted the research to be described in the chapters to follow. First, even allowing for the fact that some of the women who dropped out of the study may have had children, there seemed to be clear educational and occupational differences between women with children and women who had no children; a much higher proportion of the education graduates had children than women who graduated from other faculties. Second, among the women with children, a higher proportion of education graduates had full- or part-time paying jobs. The relationship between educational and occupational choices and both childbearing and childrearing decisions seemed clear. What the survey data could not supply were the reasons *why* these relationships existed. Further research was needed to uncover them.

Research design

The aim of this research was not to demonstrate the existence of relationships, but rather to ask *why* they exist, or *how* they come about. Thus it was interpretive, rather than deductive. Put another way, the interpretive goal was to try to uncover the intervening linkage by which the independent variables (in this case educational and occupational choices) affect the dependent variables -- decisions related to child bearing and childraising (Goldenberg, 1992: 116). The aggregate data from the 1992 survey demonstrated that education graduates were much more likely than other graduates to have children, and to remain attached to the paid labour force after having them. But more information was needed to *explain* these relationships than was available from the survey data. It seemed clear that in-depth interviews with a representative sample of the 1992 women graduates would help provide an explanation.

The aim of the research was not to generalize findings to some clearly larger population, as might be the case with a large-scale survey using aggregate data from a probability sample. Here the intention was to explore a relationship found to exist for a particular group. Given that face-to-face interviews are labour-intensive and expensive, the goal was to choose as many respondents from the group as possible, and to make the interview sample as representative as possible of the larger group. It was decided that about 60 women -- chosen from the pool of 142 from the 1992 survey still resident in Alberta -- would be approached for an interview. Four variables (three theoretical, one more practical) directed the selection of this group: prospective interviewees were drawn roughly equally from two categories of educational background (education graduates, and all others); within those two main groups, women with children and childless women would be almost equally represented; women in full-time paid employment, part-time paid employment and those not in the paid labour force would also be represented. The number of Edmonton interviews would be roughly proportional to the numbers of Edmonton residents in the two educational groups. While it seemed important to include rural residents as well, the decision was made to avoid locations that were not within a few hours' drive of either Edmonton or Calgary. Implicit in this sampling strategy was a decision to oversample mothers from faculties other than education: given that there were so few of them in 1992, *all* these women were approached, and an equivalent number of education graduate mothers were also chosen for purposes of comparison.

Table 5 demonstrates the sample selection in detail. Within each cell, respondents' original survey numbers were listed, and an appropriate number (based on the criteria just noted) were randomly circled. Addresses were checked, and (in the case of rural residents) alternate respondents were chosen if the first choice lived too far away. Two letters were sent together to 61 women in early November, 1993, one from Dr. Harvey Krahn, representing the Population Research Laboratory and the Youth Employment Study, introducing the interviewer, the second from the interviewer herself, outlining the research and asking permission for the interview. Follow-up telephone calls were then made on an on-going basis from late

TABLE 5: Sampling frame for interview sample

Other*/with chn/Edm.

	N avail@	N appr	N int
FT#	3	3	3
PT	1	1	1
Ho	2	2	2

Educ./with chn/Edm.

	N avail	N appr	N int
FT	8	4	3
PT	4	2	2
Ho	1	-	-

Other/married/no chn/Edm.

	N avail	N appr	N int
FT	15	5	4[7]+
PT	2	1	1[1]
Ho	-	-	-

Educ/married/no chn/Edm.

	N avail	N appr	N int
FT	7	3	3[3]
PT	1	-	-
Ho	2	1	1

Other/single/Edm.

	N avail	N appr	N int
FT	19	5	3
PT	2	1	1
Ho	5	2	-

Educ/single/Edm.

	N avail	N appr	N int
FT	7	2	2
PT	1	-	-
Ho	-	-	-

Other/with chn/exEd

	N avail	N appr	N int
FT	1	1	1
PT	1	1	1
Ho	4	4	3

Educ/with chn/exEd

	N avail	N appr	N int
FT	12	7	4
PT	3	1	1
Ho	4	2	1

Other/married/no chn/exEd

	N avail	N appr	N int
FT	8	2	2[2]
PT	-	-	-
Ho	2	1	1[1]

Educ/married/no chn/exEd

	N avail	N appr	N int
FT	11	5	3[3]
PT	1	-	-[1]
Ho	2	1	-[1]

Other/single/exEd

	N avail	N appr	N int
FT	5	1	-
PT	1	-	-
Ho	-	-	-

Educ/Single/exEd

	N avail	N appr	N int
FT	7	3	2
PT	-	-	-
Ho	-	-	-

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* Other faculties/ Education
@ Number available/ approached/interviewed
# Employment status
+ Telephone interviews
Edm=Edmonton/exEd=outside

November, confirming the prospective interviewees' willingness to participate and arranging interview times. Of the 61 women approached, two refused to participate, one had died of cancer, and eight could not be reached by telephone (in most cases because they had moved, the telephone number was not in service and there was no alternate address). Fifty women agreed to be interviewed, and the interviews were conducted from mid-November, 1993 to March, 1994. In total, 45 interviews were completed. One woman failed to keep an appointment and did not respond to a further telephone contact, and four women, while willing in principle to be interviewed, proved in the end too difficult to schedule. (Two were single women in the process of job relocation, one was coping with the stress of a very ill father).

The face-to-face interviews included all who could be reached of the women graduates from faculties other than education who had children in 1992. In the interests of making the study as comprehensive as possible, in view of the small numbers of women from other faculties who had had children by 1992, and in view of the issue emerging from the completed interviews on the *choosing* of children, an attempt was made to conduct telephone interviews with as many as could be reached of the remaining 31 women from all faculties who were married and childless in 1992. The telephone interviews were conducted through the summer of 1994. In this case an initial contact was made by telephone, with a letter explaining the study sent as a follow-up. A further telephone call was then made either to conduct the interview, or to set a convenient future date. Of the 31 women, six had either moved and could not be reached, or had left addresses with relatives who did not pass messages on; six were approached and mailed letters, but were consistently unavailable for further telephone contact. Nineteen women completed telephone interviews.

Description of the sample

On the basis of the 1992 information, the 45 women interviewed in depth fitted the categories as shown in Table 6. Briefly, there were 22 education graduates and 23 graduates from other faculties, with 11 women in each group classified as having children. Not surprisingly, the transition to motherhood did not cease with the 1992 survey. By the time they were interviewed, two of the married women (one arts graduate, one science graduate) who were childless in 1992 had had babies. One arts graduate and three education graduates, also childless in 1992, were pregnant for the first time. Table 7 shows the family situation of the women when they were interviewed.

There were also shifts in employment status between 1992 and the time of the interviews, notably among the women with children. Five of these women had made moves to reduce their level of paid employment. One woman, childless and working

TABLE 6: Family status of interview sample from 1992 information

	Education graduates		Other graduates	
Married with children	11	[32]*	11	[12]
Married, no children	7 (+8)**	[24]	8 (+11)	[27]
Single	4	[15]	4	[32]

* = N available in category
** = N interviewed by telephone

TABLE 7: Family status of in-person interviews at interview date

	Education graduates	Other graduates
Married with children	11	13
Married, pregnant	3	1
Married, no children	4	5
Engaged	1	-
Single	3	4

full-time in 1992, was at home with a baby when interviewed. One woman, classified as working full-time in 1992, was out of the labour force when interviewed. Another woman moved from part-time work to no paid employment, and two others moved from full-time to part-time work. Two of the mothers had taken on more paid work -- one moving back into part-time paid work after an extended break to care for her first child, one greatly expanding her part-time paid work commitment. Two of the married women without children, unemployed in 1992, were working full-time when interviewed. And one of the single women, working part-time in 1992, was working full-time when interviewed. In all, 10 of the women (22 per cent of the total) experienced some shift in their participation in the labour force in the two years or so between the 1992 survey and the time they were interviewed.

For the 19 women interviewed by telephone, all of whom had been childless in 1992, there were also changes. Six of them had had babies, and two more were pregnant for the first time. Four of the women with children had also experienced shifts in employment status. One, who was childless and in full-time paid employment in 1992 was at home caring for her baby; two had moved from full-time to part-time work; one, who was working as a substitute teacher when she became pregnant, was negotiating a job-share position, but was also willing to take a full-time teaching job if one became available.

Methodology

The method chosen for this research was a semi-structured, open-ended interview. The precise character of the interview is described in greater detail below, but in brief it sought information on each woman's work and family history, the decisions she had made -- or was in the process of making -- about work and family, and the circumstances surrounding the decision. The women in the interviews represented a wide range of domestic situations: there were women who were married or in relationships and who had children, married women who were pregnant for the first time, married women who had no children, and single or separated and divorced women who had no children. So the line of questioning had to change to fit these different situations. The interviews, both face-to-face and by telephone, were informal, and loosely based on the guides included in Appendix A. But the guides were used more as reminders about information that seemed important: if the woman herself volunteered the information, the question was not asked (Greed, 1990). A further decision of the interviewing process (and, again, one that will be elaborated below) was to allow the process to be open-ended. As Cockburn (1991) commented of her interviewing strategy, "Always I used the rule of thumb: go with the material" (Cockburn, 1991: 6). Thus each interview had an underlying structure comprising two parts. The first addressed a clear research agenda: the need to get answers to questions relating to women's work and family situation, in order to help clarify the relationship already demonstrated to exist between employment choices and family decision-making. The second part of the interview in a sense addressed the woman's agenda, and the issues that *she* considered either important or relevant or simply necessary for her to say.

The 45 face-to-face interviews lasted from about 45 minutes to more than two hours, and permission was obtained to tape-record all of them. Of these interviews, 23 were fully transcribed by outside help, and the transcripts were later checked against the replayed tape. The remaining tapes were replayed, and transcribed in an edited version by the interviewer. [1] The telephone interviews were shorter, lasting on average about half an hour. The same interview guidelines were used as for the face-to-face interviews, but the more impersonal context produced briefer responses, and less of the rich, unsolicited detail of the in-person interviews. Notes were made as the telephone interviews were in progress, and the notes were typed up at the end of each one.

The involvement of members of an on-going panel study in face-to-face, highly personalized interviews reaching into areas not covered by the survey research posed particular challenges. First, there were expectations raised by the previous surveys, which had been clearly constructed as relating mainly to work and employment. While this was an important focus of the present research also, it was necessary to explain why family matters would also be part of the interview, and that for this research family work was also understood to be work. It was also clear, given the particular focus of the Youth Employment Study, that certain questions could *not* be asked, however relevant they might be for the present project. For example, women who are strongly committed to childlessness might at some point have had, or considered having, an abortion. Women who declare themselves to be single on survey forms may be in lesbian relationships; sexual orientation may be a complicating factor in decision-making about having children. Both of these issues are not only far removed from the topics study participants would have come to expect, but they are also sensitive, and controversial in themselves. Asking about abortion or sexual orientation might have caused people to drop out of this project -- but it might also have caused them to drop out of the Youth Employment Study. Obligations to the ongoing study meant that no such risks could be taken.

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[1] A malfunctioning tape-recorder meant one interview was not recorded. Comprehensive notes of this interview were written up as soon as the problem was noticed -- fortunately very shortly after the interview concluded.

Those obligations also meant even greater concern about imposing on participants, or asking more than they were very willing to give. It was important to bear in mind that the women who were interviewed had already given a great deal to the study, and might in the future be asked to participate in further surveys. It was important not to exhaust their goodwill with the interview. One of the consequences of this belief was that, for example, interviews were conducted at times and also in places that were convenient to the woman herself. This meant that almost all of the mothers were interviewed in their homes, with their children around. In some ways, this was less than ideal. But the alternative -- requiring women to arrange child care, and perhaps also travel to an outside interview location -- seemed to be too much to ask. (And in any case, as will be noted below, the wish to respect each woman's needs and preferences had another basis also.)

Against these constraints, the *advantages* of working with this group were considerable. The fact that they had remained involved in the Youth Employment Study over eight years and through five waves of surveys meant that they were highly committed to, and interested in, the ongoing research. In some ironic sense, some felt that their selection for the interview was a reward for their ongoing participation; certainly most of them seemed pleased to have personal contact with a representative of the larger study, however peripherally she was attached to it. This interest and commitment made the interview task much easier. A further advantage was the bank of information available from the surveys for each woman interviewed. It occasionally indicated particular questions that needed to be asked, or gave advance notice of unusual situations. Above all, it provided a record against which the woman's memories could be checked. It also meant that neither party in the interview was starting the process "cold."

The interview: a personal account

The academic third person, whose passive voice has done the talking up to now, must at this stage give way to *me*, the person doing the research, and the person intimately involved in the interviews which are its heart. It was in fact the inevitable intrusion of the first person on the interviewing process that made that process very different from what I had planned. And as Stanley claims, written accounts of feminist research "should locate the feminist researcher firmly within the activities of her research as an essential feature of what is 'feminist' about it" (Stanley, 1990: 12).

I began the research with a detailed conceptual framework which I thought would explain the way reproductive decision-making, and subsequent employment decision-making, might happen. And I had developed an elaborate schedule of interview questions which I thought would give me the information I needed to verify my framework. Though I spoke at that stage of doing qualitative research, proposed to keep questions open-ended, and was willing to pursue additional topics with the women I was interviewing, my planned approach was actually much more deductive than interpretive. In effect it lasted no longer than the first interview.

This interview was with Penny, [2] who is introduced in Chapter 5 and again in Chapter 8. When we spoke, in her home, her two-year-old was in his grandmother's company in the kitchen, and her six-week-old baby slept in a basket at our feet in the living room. I followed my elaborate schedule, with many probes and digressions. Penny, courteous and thoughtful, answered at length. But the interview seemed to take *ages*. The baby began to stir. Penny, six weeks postpartum and breastfeeding on demand, was quite visibly tiring. I could see her eyelids literally drooping from fatigue. I finally left, feeling grateful for her patience but very concerned about my process. Apart from the time they took to answer, there was no guarantee that my long list of questions would unlock, for every woman interviewed, what I really wanted to know. The fact was that I could not know ahead of time what, for each woman, it was important to know.

In the course of the next several interviews, I modified the process considerably. In effect, I abandoned the lengthy interview schedule in favour of some guidelines which I felt covered the most important ground. I began to "go with the material." But I was not the first feminist researcher to discover that "going with the material" -- and regarding the interview, as I did, as a social relationship undertaken by equals -- meant abandoning some old rules also. No-one has articulated the dilemmas of this kind of enterprise better than Ann Oakley, whose article "Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms" (Oakley, 1981) is widely cited in the literature on feminist research methodology, and on feminist approaches to interviewing in particular. Oakley's research on women's experience of childbirth involved extensive interviewing with women at a stage in their lives when "they had every reason to exclude strangers altogether in order to concentrate on the momentous experiences being lived through" (Oakley, 1981: 43). Sometimes they were confused by their encounters with medical personnel; sometimes they were frightened about the impending birth; there was a lot they didn't know about caring for babies. Oakley, who saw them several times before and after the birth, was herself a mother. She came to be an information resource and a source of support. She found it impossible to be the kind of interviewer described in positivist methods texts -- the kind who is "friendly but not too friendly", who concentrates on extracting information, who discloses nothing for fear of prejudicing the information extracted, who is, above all, not emotionally involved. I was always aware that I could not pretend to be a detached observer or listener, that the women I was with would construct some personality for me if I chose to withhold my own. And I did not. In many ways talking to them meant revisiting my own life. I shared a great deal of their collective background: a middle class family, a university degree, a professional career -- for a short time I was even a teacher of small children, as many of them were. I too had waited to have children, and agonized over the decision to have them. I had struggled with the dilemma of keeping connected to my professional work while being the primary caregiver in a traditional marriage, of reconciling my own need for a professional identity with my passionate conviction that I was the best person to care for my children when they were young. In asking the women I interviewed about their feelings and experiences, it seemed only fair to share my own if they were interested. To the women I was interviewing I was, in Reinharz's terms, not a friend, and not a stranger, but rather a "knowledgeable stranger" (Reinharz, 1992: 27).

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[2] The names of interviewees, and some other identifying details, have been changed in the interests of preserving confidentiality.

Obviously not all researchers agree. Gerson (1985), who also explores, as her book sub-title has it, "how women decide about work, career and motherhood," used a lengthy and complex interview schedule with her women respondents. She writes of taking care to "achieve a sense of rapport and trust with the respondents" by scheduling the interviews at times and in places chosen by them. In Gerson's interview situation, no spouses or older children were allowed in the interview room, though "on rare occasions" a toddler or infant was present. Gerson also notes that no personal information about the interviewer was given until the interview was completed. She adds:

> At the end of the interview, I was often asked to reveal my own choices and plans, especially concerning childbearing. I replied by asking the respondent what she imagined my situation to be. In each case the respondent concluded that my decisions were similar to her own. This response underscores the degree to which trust was gained, for both mothers and childless women typically assumed I was like them (Gerson, 1985: 246).

I find Gerson's approach troubling. It suggests to me a manipulation of the research participants. But I also question its ultimate effectiveness. Many of my interviews -- and almost all the interviews with mothers -- were conducted in the women's homes. Over many cups of coffee and tea, I also met many of the children, and recorded their voices, too, on the tapes. In observing and being part of these interactions, I felt I was catching important glimpses of what life was like for the women I was talking with. And because I had shared so much of what I was observing, sometimes it made sense to say so. In any case, what would be the point of disguising my obvious familiarity with the setting, and the fact that I too had children? By the same token, why conceal from the childless women the fact that I too had been childless at their age? As Oakley (1981) has pointed out, refusal to provide any sort of personal feedback does not promote rapport and may actually prevent people from freely sharing information. But apart from that, taking without being willing to give in return establishes a relationship as inequitable.

My particular sharing took two main forms. The first happened when a woman spoke of an experience or a feeling which I too had had. For example, Carla, introduced in Chapter 6, was describing her surprise at the change and disruption caused by a second baby.

> Carla: After I had the second child, it was like, holy moly. You know, I found a lot of change. A lot more demand. A lot more, you know, like the interaction between the two, and -- you know what I mean?
> Gillian: I found that. I've got two kids. And I thought I was the perfect mother with one!
> Carla: You know, it's a piece of cake with one.

The second form involved affirming either actions or feelings. For example Dorothy, who appears in Chapter 5 and 8, had taken on the major challenge of three step-children, all of whom had serious emotional problems. She spoke of the ways she was trying to help the eldest, now a teenager:

> Dorothy: I didn't have the years with her to build a natural type of rapport, you know, although we are extremely close, as far as, every day she comes home and she will tell me everything. And even if she's bad, you know, she knows she's going to get in trouble, or she knows I'm going to, you know but . . . hopefully that will last a lot longer.
> Gillian: I agree, I mean that is so important. Good for you that you've been able to set that up, to be that sort of person for her.

What was my rationale for giving such affirmation? Simply that it happened in the context of an evolving relationship which positioned me to respond as any sympathetic and supportive person would. Dorothy spoke of "being strong for everyone" but getting very little support herself -- yet she was describing achievements in her troubled family that were little short of heroic. Many women get very little support for much of the work they do, and many of the women in the interviews, perhaps for that reason, felt the interview as a whole had been supportive. This was the case with Catherine, whose story appears in Chapter 9. Catherine talked movingly of her struggle to survive a traumatic period in her life. The transcript shows that I made very little verbal response, but in fact I sat through most of the interview with tears in my eyes, unable to speak. Catherine, showing me to the door after we had finished, thanked me and told me she had felt supported.

Though they were generally shorter and less personal, some of the telephone interviews seemed to engage the respondents in a surprising way also. This was especially true for women who had encountered unusual setbacks or troubles. The woman whose difficulty re-establishing a teaching career after a rural school board terminated her contract is reported in Chapter 9 phoned back several days after the interview. She wanted to report progress in her most recent job search, even though she had not been asked to do so. Bev, whose story of marital breakdown, unemployment and depression also appears in Chapter 9, talked for a long time on the telephone. "A sad interview," my notes read. "I know she would welcome another call. I don't think I really can -- but it's tempting."

Since I was deriving enormous benefit from the interviews, I hoped they would have some value for the women also. In many cases, as Oakley (1980, 1992) also found, the value was in being heard -- the opportunity to speak to a sympathetic listener was clearly perceived as supportive. Many of the women told me how much they had enjoyed the experience, and expressed a willingness to meet me again if I wished. For example, Melanie, who is introduced in Chapter 8, spoke of levels of support in her family:

> I'm the emotional support-giver. So anybody that gives me emotional support is . . . I mean, this interview is the closest thing that I've had, about talking about myself for a long time.

Several of the women said the interview had made them "think about things", and this they construed as helpful and interesting. But I sensed that for some, the "things" that the interview raised were painful and difficult. A couple of them were in unambiguously oppressive situations; I wondered how interesting or helpful it was for these women to review their work and family experiences.

My own personal and emotional involvement in the research process is characteristic of much feminist research, which is distinguished, by the "blurring of the disconnection between formal and personal relations" and the "removal of the distinction between the research project and the researcher's life" (Reinharz, 1992: 263). This research also reflects an attempt to uncover a particular set of social relationships from the standpoint of a particular group of women (Smith, 1987; Hartsock, 1987). As I have tried to show, it is a standpoint I am well qualified to work from. But how does this approach affect the nature of the information shared? Did I "contaminate the data" by my active participation in the interviews? Or did I enable the women to speak more freely of matters which are at the heart of the research project? I would argue strongly that my approach overall improved the "quality" of the data. I hesitate to speak about it in those terms, however, because I did not behave as I did in order to get "better" information, but rather because I would have felt very uncomfortable behaving any other way.

I also do not mean to discount some real concerns raised by the close identification of researcher and research participants. The researcher may be desensitized by over-familiarity (Greed, 1990), seeing and hearing only what she expects, from her own experience, to see and hear. The second concern, closely related, refers to the terms by which experience is described. The description by Woodward and Chisholm (1981) of attempts to word interview questions in ideologically neutral ways made me realize the pitfalls, as well as the advantages, of "going with the material." Questions asked "off the cuff" may not be as clear as those that have been carefully thought out and written down; the transcripts show that I did sometimes travel in wide interrogatory circles. Spontaneous questions are also more likely to be couched in the terms of the familiar dominant discourse which it is then all too easy for respondents to fall into as well. For example, asking a woman if her husband "helps" with childcare makes all sorts of assumptions about the division of labour which may not necessarily apply. I wasn't always as careful as I could have been to avoid the trap. But as I noted in my working journal after reading the Woodward and Chisholm article, in terms of the particular helping-husband trap, "I have to think that in any of the family situations I explored with the interviews, the presence of a husband who did more than 'help' would have loudly declared itself."

It is impractical to reproduce every transcript in order to scrutinize my use of discourse. In any case I would be the first to admit that any scrutineer would find muddled, misleading or leading questions. I see, reading the transcripts, questions that could have been better asked, as well as missed cues, and things said but not heard. On the other hand, I see a lot of evidence of what I can only call speaking from the heart, and much of this is what I have reproduced in the chapters to follow. The interviews, as noted above, did have a dual structure. There were guidelines for each, and every woman talked about her working life and her family situation, in keeping with the interpretive agenda of uncovering the relationship between occupational choice and reproductive and childrearing decisions. Beyond that, "going with the material" produced other themes worthy of study.

In the presentation of the interview material, I have chosen to make very clear the similarities and differences between the women, on the grounds that variation is as significant as the discovery of regular patterns. So if, for example, four women in a particular group express one opinion, and three others express another, I do not talk in terms of "most women," but present both positions. Finally, the goal of this research goes beyond simply giving women voice (Currie, 1988; Gorelick, 1991). But their voices are important. My practice has therefore been to summarize main themes or ideas in my own words, and use excerpts -- sometimes lengthy ones -- from the interviews for illustration.

The next five chapters lay out the findings of the research. Four of the five (chapters 5-8) describe the women who have made the transition to motherhood. After a discussion of the factors which led to their becoming mothers (chapter 5), the focus shifts to a closer examination of their daily lives, and the ways they are presently combining childrearing with paid employment. Thus Chapter 6 relates to the women who are in full-time paid employment, Chapter 7 describes the women who are in formal part-time paid employment, and Chapter 8 discusses the lives of women who have withdrawn from formal paid employment and are home-based. The focus of Chapter 9 is the women who are childless.

Information from the telephone interviews is used to extend and confirm the material obtained in the more extensive face-to-face interviews. It is cited directly in Chapters 5 and 9, which are "survey" chapters relating in general terms to the women with children, and the women without children, respectively. Because the telephone interviews tended to support the findings of the face-to-face interviews, rather than add new insights, they are not cited directly in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. These chapters draw on the more richly detailed face-to-face interviews to elaborate the themes which emerged in *both* interview types.

CHAPTER 5

CHILDREN -- BY CHANCE OR CHOICE

This chapter introduces the women in the study who had children -- who had made the transition to motherhood. The focus here is on why they decided to have children -- if in fact motherhood was a choice. As noted in Chapter 2 (for example, Gee, 1986), educated women are likely to defer having children. Presumably, they postpone motherhood until the "right time" arrives. Currie (1988) suggests that "right time" may involve a particular configuration of material circumstances. But other questions were also raised from the review of relevant literature, which are addressed here. Specifically, what were the working lives of these women like before they had children? What impact did their early educational choices and work histories have on their decision to become mothers?

The first point that needs to be made is that the women with children did not necessarily plan to become mothers. But the interviews suggested that the question of whether or not a pregnancy is planned [1] is not always obvious. In some cases, of course, the distinction is very clear. A woman whose life plans actually precluded a pregnancy, and who describes herself as "devastated" to discover she was pregnant, may safely be said not to have planned her pregnancy. At the other end of the scale, the couple who stop using contraception and start timing intercourse to coincide with the woman's ovulation may safely be said to have planned any ensuing pregnancy. But between these two extremes is a wide area which includes unintended pregnancies which were in fact very welcome, pregnancies which occurred because couples stopped using contraception and "if it happened, it happened", and pregnancies which were clearly intended, but which came a little earlier than scheduled.

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[1] Because of the constraints on questioning imposed by the nature of the study (see Chapter 4) the women were simply asked whether or not a pregnancy was planned. No further details were sought -- though in a few cases they were volunteered.

A further point worth making is that whether a child was "planned", and what the motivation was for the planning, are probably not questions that can be reliably answered once the child has arrived. Original intentions and motivations are subverted to the reality of the child's presence, and quickly become irrelevant in most cases. The classification of intent which follows is based on women's responses to questions about whether their pregnancies were planned, but the difficulty of classifying accurately should be borne in mind. It should also be noted that the focus here is on *first* pregnancies, given that it is the first pregnancy which signals the shift from childlessness to motherhood.

Unplanned pregnancies

Of the 36 women who either had children or were pregnant for the first time when they were interviewed, six described their first pregnancies as unplanned. Five of the six were on average four years older than the average age of this group, and had had at least one other child by 1993. All but one of these later pregnancies were described as planned.

Two of these six women were not married or in relationships where childrearing could be expected to be shared. But for whatever reasons, [2] they, like the others in this group, accepted both the pregnancy and the responsibility for childrearing which accompanied it. For example, Laura, who had been working on a seasonal contract, spoke of her fears about getting work and about telling her family of her pregnancy, and her anger at the disruption of other plans she had made. She commented:

> I don't like to say it was a bad time, because I don't resent having [her child] at all. But it was one of the most stressful periods of my life to date.

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[2] Because of the constraints noted earlier (Chapter 4) it was judged inappropriate to probe whether, for example, abortion was considered as an option in these (or any other) pregnancies. It is also possible, of course, that some of the currently childless women may have terminated pregnancies in the past. While such information would not require any reclassification of respondents on the basis of whether or not they were currently raising children, it would certainly illuminate the nature of their commitment to childlessness at some time in the past.

Hilary, who was 27 when her first child was born, was single, and working at a less than secure job for a non-profit organization. Two years later, she married and had another (unplanned) baby. She wondered aloud when she *would* have planned to have children, if she had been a planner:

> If I would have been interested in planning them then I wouldn't have had them at that stage of my life, I would have waited until I had 'something-with-a-future,' something stable. . . I never saw myself as having a family. I always had a real negative attitude towards the world, fairly cynical mostly. . . But when I got pregnant it became very obvious that I didn't have a choice about it. So I just sort of made do, and -- I myself was an only child so when I had the next "oops", it just became obvious that, yeah, if you have one, you should have two. They work together.

The four other women in the group were all either married or in stable relationships when they became pregnant. Only for Carla, living far from her family in the Maritimes, in a city where she "didn't know a soul," and in the middle of a long-sought university degree program, was the discovery of her pregnancy reported as seriously upsetting. Bonnie, whose physician had told her her chances of conceiving without fertility drugs were "one in 10,000," was "all in a glow" when she discovered she was pregnant. Marie, who got pregnant just as she was finishing her education degree, and whose baby was born just when she had expected to be starting her first teaching job, described mixed feelings in which happiness predominated:

> I was sort of happy and sort of disappointed because I thought, gee, I was really . . . preparing myself to work in September, and obviously I wasn't going to work in September because that was when [the baby] was going to

> be born. And yet I was happy because this was an exciting time in our life too, to have this child. So it was sort of a dilemma there first, am I happy or sad? And of course, I was quite happy with the rest of the term, and, I knew that I would be able to get a job at some point in time. I'd just have to put it on hold for a little while. And, so that's exactly what happened. [The baby] was born in September and, I'll never forget, I think six weeks after she was born I received a phone call from a principal asking me if I was ready to go back to work.[3]

Mona, now the mother of two, agreed with Hilary on the difficulty of identifying the "right time" to have a baby: "I don't know when we would have planned the kids!" She described her first pregnancy *retrospectively* as "good timing".

"Semi-planned" pregnancies

The meaning of "semi-planned" in this context is deliberately ambiguous. It is used to describe two situations: the first is where a child was clearly planned but the pregnancy occurred a little earlier than intended; the second is where the pregnancy was not being actively sought, but not being actively prevented either. The first pregnancies of five of the women could be described as "semi-planned".

For example, Kate, a teacher, commented that her first child arrived "within months" of when she had been planned. Kate had hoped to finish the school year in June, but the baby was born in April. Christine and her husband had just built a house. She planned to work for another year and then get pregnant. Instead she got pregnant after two months.

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[3] Two conventions are used in the reproduction of interview excerpts such as this one: three periods (...) indicate that words have been left out, either for clarity or to bridge statements relating to the same topic. Words inside square brackets were not the actual words spoken, but are inserted to clarify meaning or context.

Lisa described her first baby as "sort of, almost" planned. She said she and her husband had decided there wasn't a "right time" to have a baby, so they should do something about it before they got too old. The "sort of" planning involved giving up contraception, but not actively trying for conception. Helene's situation was the same:

> I don't know that we would ever have sat down and planned it. I don't know if we would ever have found a right time, because we were really very happy and very selfish! We went out a lot and loved the entertaining and being out with people and going to [hockey] games, and, oh, all the things that you do when you have two incomes and no kids. We really enjoyed it, enjoyed the freedom . . . We hadn't even, through eight years of courtship and years of marriage too . . . really *seriously* discussed children all that much. . . I think we both kind of knew it was going to happen, but as far as really sitting down and talking about it, and making some serious decisions, it never happened. . . I think we were deciding to sort of let it happen in its own time, without sort of going through the dialogue.

Angela had intended to teach for two years after her marriage before having a baby. Instead she got pregnant immediately, and had her baby a good year ahead of schedule. But there was a strong sense in which, for Angela, this acceleration of her plans was not a cause of regret. Her mother died of ovarian cancer in 1987, and an aunt and two cousins -- all on the same side of the family -- also died of cancer. When she was interviewed, Angela's first child was 19 months old. She had recently had a miscarriage, but was trying to get pregnant again as soon as possible. After a second pregnancy, she planned to have a hysterectomy and ovariectomy to reduce her own cancer risk.

Planned pregnancies

More than two-thirds of the women who had been pregnant at least once -- 25 out of 36 -- described their pregnancies as planned. In these cases, planning seemed to involve the intentional achievement of a pregnancy at a time which, for various reasons, seemed to be "right". For the women who described their pregnancies as planned, the focus of questioning in the interviews was on their *reasons* for the timing.

Two situations stood out as significantly different from the rest. Maria's family planning, like Angela's, was shadowed by the risk of cancer. Maria and her husband decided to have their baby when they did because Maria had had cervical cancer. Because the cancer could recur, she was intending to have a hysterectomy in the following year. "That is a cloud," she said. Dorothy married a divorced man with three children, who came to live with Dorothy and their father. She wanted a baby as soon as possible after she was married, so that the gap between the children's ages would not be too great. "We already had a family," she commented. "I wasn't about to wait. What was the difference? Our lives were already family, we didn't have time together."

In most other cases, several reasons were cited in combination. The most common were age, attainment of financial security (variously defined, but often including the purchase of a house), job security and the achievement of professional goals on the part of either or both partners. For example, Siobhan had wanted to have children sooner than she did, but described how she was delayed by career constraints:

> School took too long, and we had sort of an agreement that I was going to work for at least three years, two or three years after I graduated -- partly because I wanted to get my professional status, and you have to work for two years in the field . . . That was part of the agreement that we had, and, after I'd worked two years I . . . started working on my husband.

Lucy isolated her age as the chief reason she had her first child when she did. At almost 30, she could "feel her biological clock ticking."

> You don't want to leave it too late because if you decide you like the first one you like to be able to have another one, and, so I'm not one of those people that would wait until I'm 40 to have my first baby . . .

According to Gail, having a baby "just kind of seemed like the next logical step."

> I guess because we had been married for a while and things were going OK there. We had our jobs . . . So both of us were kind of working on getting further than where we were at the time. It just seemed like the right thing to do. I think the other thing was, I mean age certainly is a factor. And I didn't want to start having kids at 35 . . . [Her husband] is seven years older than me. And he's kind of always 'Not now, not now'. I kind of

> put it into perspective for him when he talked about early retirement and I said,'You're going to have young kids at home with your early retirement. Just keep that in mind'. . . I think we started to think about how it would be down the road and maybe that helped the decision too.

Tania, a bank manager, cited comfort with her marriage and the ticking biological clock as reasons for wanting her first child. But she also noted:

> I didn't want to have kids before I became manager because I felt it would limit my chances of becoming one. And once I'd become one then they have to give me the same level of job back.

For the women who were teachers, this ongoing job security was achieved by a permanent teaching certificate and a permanent contract with a school board. For most teachers, both were acquired after two years of full-time employment with a board. Sandra, an elementary school teacher, described the part her permanent contract played in her family planning:

> I have it, yeah. And I am so thankful for that. I think I knew that I wanted that before I even considered having kids. I needed that. That was my security blanket in a sense. And I know now, I think you can take up to a two-year leave with your permanent, then they have to place you. Not necessarily at the school that you left but they do have to place you.

Of the 36 women who were pregnant or had children, 18 of them had worked as teachers (or were education graduates trying to get work as teachers). Eleven of these women had permanent full-time teaching jobs at the time they first became pregnant. All but one of them took maternity leave, and returned to teaching, either full- or part-time, under the provisions of their teaching contracts. The eleventh took a two-year maternity leave, at the end of which she gave birth to her second child. She was entering her third year of maternity leave, and was still technically an employee of the school board holding her contract -- though she was intending to resign a few months later. Of the remaining seven teachers, one had her first child before she got a permanent teaching job, but was able to take maternity leave and return to teaching after the births of her second and third children. Five had not yet started full-time teaching jobs and so were outside the system. Only one resigned from a full-time teaching job, but after her second child, not her first. In fact, she resigned only because she thought that working full-time as a babysitter would earn her more money than teaching part-time, as well as allowing her to be home with her own children. All of this points to the possibility that there is something about the way the work of teaching is organized that greatly facilitates its combination with child-rearing. As Sarah, a teacher pregnant with her first child, comments, it's not the fact that teachers are "naturally" fond of or more knowledgeable about children that predisposes them to early motherhood:

> We have a really good union. We have very good benefits. We have a very good contract. A lot of those things make it very safe to have kids. You get time away, you get to go back, you get time away, you get to go back, you get paid while you're off. . . All your different benefit packages, they'll carry your packages, you can still pay into your packages. That's pretty nice. You get the six months if you want it. You can't say that if you're in engineering or science. Some other . . . of these degree areas don't necessarily make for a continuous job.

For many of the mothers or mothers-to-be whose pregnancies involved some degree of planning, their jobs had something to do with their timing. In the cases discussed so far, the security afforded by seniority, promotions or permanent contracts played an important part. But eight of the women, as well as mentioning such factors as age or financial security, also explicitly described the pregnancy as giving them the opportunity to make a break from work -- either temporarily or permanently. Tania, the bank manager introduced earlier, returned to her job after a maternity leave. But she was "ready for a change" in her life. "I couldn't wait to take a break from work," she said.

For the seven others, the break was more lasting. Three of them were unemployed at the time they got pregnant, and the *fact* of their unemployment made a pregnancy seem logical. For example, Annette, formerly an engineer, had given up her job to accommodate her husband's job transfer. "I wasn't working and we were fairly settled," she said, describing some of the reasons for the timing of her first pregnancy. Linda, a nurse, said that she and her husband started to think about a baby "after I got laid off from my full-time position."

For four of the women, however, their desire for a pregnancy coincided with a dissatisfaction with the work they were doing, and/or a conviction that it could not be combined with family life. Jessica, a former child-care counsellor, had been working in a treatment centre for disturbed adolescent children. The high level of stress under which she worked, and the constant risk of violence, persuaded her that she could not keep on with the job if she also wanted to start a family. "I mean, can you imagine having to restrain a child or get kicked in the stomach when you are pregnant?" she asked. Jennifer, three months pregnant when interviewed, had been working for the provincial government as a crown prosecutor:

> In this job, in this particular job, I don't think I could do justice to the child and I've made the decision that. . . either after maternity leave or in the near future, I'm quitting, because it's not fair. I come home, I can't even talk to my husband because I'm so wound up, stressed out.

Penny, the teacher mentioned earlier who was entering her third year of maternity leave, in fact planned to resign her position -- and had been fairly sure, from the time she was first pregnant, that she would do so eventually. A deeply involved and committed teacher before having children, she too saw a pregnancy as a respite:

> Professionally I was at a point where I needed to leave the classroom for a while. I was getting very tired. The one thing in education that's sort of, well it's ironical that in any other kind of profession, if you do really well . . . you either get a promotion, or a special bonus, or extra holidays, or you're rewarded in some sense. And in teaching it sort of works backwards, that if you prove yourself competent in any measure they give you more to do, or you get the more difficult class or the more difficult load. . . So in that sense I was in a bit of a bind because I was getting burnt out, and didn't have the perspective to see that. . . And so, I was sort of at a crossroads. I had to choose what I wanted to do, either leave it completely or explore a different position within a school. My husband was getting more established with his job so there wasn't that pressure financially that I had to continue. I had the option of leaving for children, or leaving for studies, or leaving to try something completely different.

Donna, a business graduate working in human resources, had been dissatisfied with her job, but decided to keep it until she became pregnant. It was while on maternity leave that she decided to resign. Contributing to the decision was a desire for a career change, and "a bit of burnout," combined with the birth of the baby. As she explained: "All of a sudden my priorities totally flipped." Donna commented that she used to "scoff" at women who stayed at home with their children, having a "holiday for life." But until she experienced it herself she had no idea of "how much work goes into it." Her own experience of being at home with her child had changed her perspective. "This is just another career," she said. "I'll explore it for [however] many years. I can always reenter the work force. Things are bad, but they're not that bad."

This chapter documents the experiences of the mothers in the study who had children "by chance or choice." It shows that unplanned pregnancies, like other unintended or unanticipated life events, are accommodated once they are accepted. Babies arrive into circumstances that their parents sometimes consider far from ideal. But they do arrive, and are somehow made to fit in. When a pregnancy is consciously planned, however, the question of timing is much more critical: the circumstances must be made to fit the baby, rather than vice versa. While the threat of cancer, or the presence of step-children, or even the ticking biological clock, have all been seen to contribute to the decision to have a child, the influence of the workplace was particularly significant for many of the women whose experiences are described in this chapter. The work they did in some cases "made it safe" to have children; in some cases the work made the prospect of children very unsafe. In some cases, the successful launching of a career was a goal that had to be met before motherhood could be contemplated. In some cases motherhood represented a break from work experienced as overly demanding. But for few, if any of these women was paid work irrelevant to the decision to have a child.

If women's paid work affects the decision to have children, however, the presence of children means that the relationship to paid work must be re-evaluated. Chapters 2 and 3 have documented the extra load which mothers in paid employment traditionally carry, and the ideology which sets them up as the people best suited to care for their children. What women do about paid work once children arrive is the subject of the next three chapters. The three possible solutions -- combining motherhood with either full- or part-time paid employment, or combining motherhood with a variety of other home-based activities -- are dealt with in turn in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

CHAPTER 6

MOTHERING AND FULL-TIME PAID WORK

For university-trained women, the combination of motherhood with full-time paid employment would seem to be the obvious, expected choice. Studies cited in Chapter 2 (for example, McRae, 1991; Greenstein, 1989) suggest that professional women, or women with relatively high levels of education, would be more likely to resume full-time work after childbirth. Yet as the interviews suggest, the decision to choose this path is not inevitable -- and the path is certainly not easy.

The decision to combine full-time paid employment with family responsibilities was made by eight of the 45 women who were interviewed in depth. Five of them had two children at the time of the interview. Two were pregnant with a second child, and one had one child. The children's ages ranged from 11 years down to 12 weeks. The mother of the infant was three months into a planned year's maternity leave from her job. The two pregnant women were also expecting to take maternity leave of at least eight months.

Almost all of the women had worked full-time continuously from the time of their graduation in 1985, had taken leave (from four to eight months) to have their babies, and then returned to full-time paid employment, usually at the same work place. Five of the women were education graduates. Two have arts degrees, and one has a commerce degree.

HELENE, 33, is an elementary school teacher who had worked in the classroom continuously since graduation. She took seven months' leave when her first child, now three, was born, and then returned to teach Grade 1. When she was interviewed, her second child was twelve weeks old, and she was looking forward to a further nine months of leave before she returned to work.

KATE, 30, is an elementary school teacher with a child aged almost two. She was expecting her second child in about six weeks. When she graduated, Kate completed a year's internship at a rural school. She was then hired by the school district where she now works. Apart from a nine-month leave with her first child, she has worked continuously since graduation.

MEGAN, 30, is an elementary school teacher with two children, aged nearly three and nine months respectively. She had a teaching job -- a temporary replacement -- two weeks after she graduated in the spring of 1985, and acquired other temporary contracts to keep teaching almost continuously until she was hired two years after graduation by the school board where she now works. She had taught in the same school for six years, with two seven-month breaks for maternity leave.

BONNIE, 37, entered university after working for eight years as a secretary. After graduation from the faculty of education she worked in a full-time job which made more use of her business background than her educational qualifications. She also did some substitute teaching, before finally getting a full-time teaching job in 1989. She has two children, aged seven and five.

MONA, 35, was an education graduate, who, though able to find full-time work, was unable to find a full-time teaching position. Two years after leaving university, she began work as an educational resource person for a non-profit agency, and has worked with the agency and its provincial umbrella organization ever since. Her first child, now eight, was born just after she graduated. She took a four-month maternity leave with her second child, now three.

LAURA, 30, works in a senior clerical position for a company which hired her when she finished university. An arts graduate with aspirations to a higher degree in clinical psychology, she did not originally intend to stay with the company. But the difficulty of returning to studies after the security of a steady pay cheque, combined with an unplanned pregnancy, changed her plans. After taking a four-month leave to have her child, now three, she returned to work for the company.

CARLA, 36, is a senior public servant, working at deputy director level in the provincial government department which she joined immediately after completing her arts degree. Her first child, born when she was still at university, is now eleven. She took a four-month maternity leave with her second child, now four.

TANIA, 31, is a business graduate who was recruited out of university for a management training program offered by one of the major banks. She continued her employment with the bank, and is now a manager in one of its branches. She is also the mother of a 17-month-old, and was expecting her second child in six months. She had taken a seven-month maternity leave with her first child, and was anticipating a similar break with her second.

The decision to work full-time

For all eight women, there was no question, before and at the time each had their first child, that they would be returning to full-time paid employment. The reasons for the decision generally involved some combination of financial need, concern about job security, and the conviction that working life offered them something important that they couldn't get from mothering alone.

For Laura and for Bonnie, the context of the decision to return to full-time work was different from that experienced by the other women. Though both are now living with their children's fathers, and though (particularly in Bonnie's case) the relationship seems secure and happy, they confronted their first pregnancies as single women, without the support of a prior long-term relationship with a partner and the assurance of a second family income.

However, finances also played a part in other back-to-work decisions. Since the birth of her children, Mona has been the main breadwinner in her family, while her partner has handled most of the child care. Helene's income as a teacher matched her husband's when their first child was born, but now hers is much bigger. Financial *need*, however, is relative. Other women put their decisions to return to full-time work in the context of the need to maintain lifestyles, rather than to make sure there was food on the table. For example, Megan referred to her family's large, pleasant new suburban home:

> We can't live in this house without two incomes. And we weren't prepared to buy an older home. And we knew that when we bought the house. We had looked at previously owned homes and sort of all these fixer-uppers and we're not fixer-upper types of people.

Tania notes a decision to buy a minivan -- more child-friendly than her sports car -- as part of her reason for returning to work:

> My position right now is that I don't really see it as no choice, it's more I want to work and I don't want us to have to go without so many things right now with one child. I could (leave work). We've been able to save and everything. But we would have to draw on our savings, though, and cut out much entertaining. Not that we do a lot of entertaining or whatever, but probably cut that practically out. And we don't really want to do that.

Concerns about long-term job security are what keep several of the women at work. For the teachers, particularly, cutbacks in educational spending announced by the provincial government throughout 1993 made them feel very nervous about doing anything at all to jeopardize what had until recently seemed to be unassailable job security. For example, Bonnie, struggling with health problems and the demands of two children, wanted to work fewer hours. She comments:

> I had asked for a reduced teaching assignment for this year, and they [the school administration] wanted it on paper. And I said, O.K., but will you give me a corresponding paper that says it's not going to mean a cut to me? You know, that they are going to cut my position . . . from full-time to part-time. And they said, no, we can't guarantee it. So I said, well, then I'll stay full-time.

Laura, facing some insecurity in her relationship, continues to work at a job which she has for many years found less than challenging. Part of her persistence comes from the fear that if she left, she might not find other work. Asked if she could do the job she now has for another 20 years, she exclaims:

> Oh! I hate to think that I could! I hope I don't have to. But if I had to, like right now I'm just grateful that I have a job. And if our society continues the way it is with these economic problems and everything, I would stay there, yeah.

Tied to concerns about job security, however, is the feeling, expressed by several of the women, that their careers represent an investment in time, money and energy which they will not willingly give up. Carla, who admitted to being "devastated" by her first, unplanned pregnancy and wanting "more out of my life," has made very fast progress into upper level management in her department. Now, she says, "I love this business." Tania comments:

> I don't want to lose everything I have worked hard for. It took a long time to get to the management level and a lot of it was grunt work and a lot of people wouldn't have done [it].

Kate says: "I've spent all these years and I don't want to just let it go." For Kate, also, personal independence is a strong motivator. She elaborates:

> We could get along fine if I didn't work. We would have to give up some things, but we would do just fine. But I also like being independent too, and [having] my own money, and so on. I wouldn't want to give that up. And that's another reason why I work now, with kids. Just because I've always been that way and I've never had to depend on anybody, except my parents of course.

In two cases, the experience of being at home on maternity leave was a poor contrast to working life. Tania described "six months of hell" with a very colicky baby. Compared with this, her work as a bank manager perhaps appeared in an even more favourable light. As she points out:

> Well, I like my job, I do. And I really feel like I'm finally doing a very good job. . . . Now this is my second management position and I know I can do it, I'm doing a good job. So you know, it's easy to go back when you know what you're doing, you feel confident in

what you're doing.

Helene, an elementary school teacher, described herself as not particularly maternal. Of her first maternity leave, she comments:

> I was never bored at home, but I was sometimes lonely. I just missed the involvement with people, the contact with people, and with children, with older children, children that would talk back!. . . And I guess I'm a person that does well with routines and schedules and babies aren't like that at all.

Mona also sees herself as temperamentally better suited to full-time work, a life choice for which she has long been prepared.

> I *knew* that I would work . . . I just don't have that much interest in being at home. I am a fairly social person. I do better working with other people. And I think I never had any doubt in my mind. But of course part of that was when I graduated from high school and through university I never felt very attractive. I just thought, well, I better resign myself to living alone, so that's going to be my life. That's actually how I envisioned it. . . So that sort of sets you in the thinking that there's no question that you'll take care of yourself.

Child care choices

When a woman returns to work after maternity leave, there is a need to find replacement care for her child. The availability of good quality, dependable child care makes the difference between, at one extreme, a relatively smooth re-entry to the work world, and at the other extreme the need to abandon plans to return. The eight full-time employees interviewed here used between them a variety of child care options. But what characterizes the experience of all of them is stability and trust. In almost every case, the chosen form of child care was perceived to work out well, child care arrangements tended to last, and children were perceived to enjoy and/or to benefit from them.

Husbands or male partners have been full-time caregivers for some part of their children's lives in four cases, and provide child care one day a week in two other cases. But even in cases such as Megan's, where the babysitter was found through an advertisement in the newspaper, the arrangement was perceived to work well. When Megan first returned to work, she took her child out to a babysitter who also cared for other children. When her second child was born, the sitter volunteered to come in to Megan's home to care for the two children. Bonnie's babysitter has children the same age as hers. The arrangement, now in its third year, has gone beyond business to friendship. The children have sleepovers at both houses, and the adults also meet socially. The babysitter's husband plays volleyball with Bonnie and her partner. Bonnie comments:

> It's very good, very good. And she treats the kids like her own. You know, she's disciplined, but she's compassionate. . . And again, she's kind of a stay-home mom. She stays home during the day but she also works part-time at night. And she has special projects for

> the kids. It's not just O.K., go watch TV or something. She is very caring too. . . So yeah, she's excellent, she's excellent.

Carla has had a similar positive experience in a situation which could easily have put paid to her working life. Her first child was born three months prematurely, seriously underweight and very ill, in the spring of 1982. When the baby was released from hospital in the fall, Carla's husband, who was temporarily out of work, cared for him for two months when Carla returned to university. Carla comments:

> I had a day home after that with a really nice elderly lady who really took over. And she probably was better than I was. I mean, she was. She took over. She told me what to do because you know . . . I had no training or anything.

This woman cared for the baby for "four or five" years, and later as a favour cared for Carla's second child for a year also. This woman was old enough to be Carla's mother, and "she took that role on." Carla comments: "I don't know what I would have done without her." Kate, like Carla, found an older woman to care for her child, and furthermore, one who was willing to come into her home.

The rare difficulties or problems are also presented as either resolved and safely in the past, or as having had a positive side. For example, the babysitter who cared for Megan's older child also cared for children after school. Megan comments:

> Sometimes there were too many kids in the house. They had a lot of part-time after-school care kids and it would turn out once in a while that they would all end up being there the same day, whereas the next day there might be three or four. . . It really wasn't always the best but in some ways I think it was really good for my son because he had the older kids to learn from.

The least favourable comments about child care were directed at day care centres, but even here complaints were minor, and in the past:

> We've been happy with this (day care). There's been a few things that have happened, you know, not major things, but that have made me think, geez, you know, I felt guilty leaving him there, or if I was at home, that kind of thing wouldn't happen. But in general it's been really good for us. (TANIA).
>
> The day cares have worked out well, you know, I mean as well as day cares work. . . They get sick more often, and all that. (CARLA).
>
> She's been in day care ever since she was five months old. . . Up until the beginning of (the month before the interview) I didn't like it at all. She was in a day care that I just wasn't satisfied with. But now she's in one that I think is excellent and came with really good recommendations. So I'm a lot happier with it now. (LAURA).

The perception that the child is also happy with the childcare arrangements makes it easier to go to work. Tania comments:

> He just loves going to day care and they love him there. He's very active and very happy and it was always very easy for me to leave him there. He never cried. You know, if he cried when I left, that would have made it a bit harder. And if he didn't do well there, I would have had some second thoughts. . .

Going back to work

All the women returned to work, leaving babies of six months or so, and trying to pick up where they had left off. But neither working life nor family life was going to be the same again. Even though most were ready to go back, and had had some control over when they would go back, they were not always prepared for what came next. Comments Helene:

> I went back to work quite happily, at the time. And after a month, I thought I was crazy. I thought, this is ludicrous, trying to do both.

At this stage, both Helene and her husband were working full time. Their baby was cared for briefly by Helene's sister and then by her sister-in-law, who ran a day home and was, in Helene's estimation, a superior, loving caregiver. Even this high quality child care did not eliminate the stress.

> We'd both come home after work tired and hungry, and cranky baby. I remember arguing about who was going to look after the baby and who was going to cook supper and we both wanted to cook supper, because we were both so tired. To me it seemed crazy sometimes. We had a housekeeper, the latter part of that year, which helped immensely. But trying to keep a house relatively clean and do everything else and meet this child's needs and meet your own needs, it just to me was overpowering, overwhelming. And I thought, it's crazy. You know, we pay somebody else to raise our kids and clean our houses. And I by this time was thinking I would like to do it myself.

The solution, in Helene's family, took another form instead. Helene's husband wanted to sell his business and take a break to plan a new career direction for himself. So for the next two years he was home full-time, providing all the child care as well as doing most of the housework and meal preparation.

No such solution has presented itself in Bonnie's household. Though her partner takes equal responsibility for after-work child care and housework, the sheer amount of work to be done in a day leaves Bonnie exhausted, and often ill. "I know where 'sick and tired' comes from," she comments:

> I'm happy with everything I'm doing, but I really think it's too much. And I've come down twice with chronic fatigue. And because of the health problem I had, I'm just getting back from my second bout of chronic anemia. . . I was so, so tired.

Both Helene and Bonnie are teachers, a fact that Helene at least feels contributes to the stress. She teaches Grade 1, an assignment she considers is particularly demanding and one which she believes she fulfilled less well once she became a working mother.

> I do really enjoy teaching, for the most part. I just feel the demands, when you have young children, are incredible, in the younger grades. But that may just be me. . . I tell people that for me Grade 1 should be for the 'lifers', the wonderful ladies that have done it for 20 years and love it, or young women who don't have children. . . My program was so much better when . . . I wasn't coming home to children, and when I could really give a lot to it. And then on the other side, someone might say, well, yeah, but you shouldn't have to give that much to your job. No, you shouldn't, but you have to live with the consequences. You have to live with your conscience . . . Because I know that last year what I didn't do, that I did when I taught

> Grade 1 before . . . I did what I could, those children survived, and they still had a good year. But I know.

Kate also speaks of the stress of teaching:

> It can be rewarding, but it can be very unrewarding. And things are getting more difficult. We have to handle many more things, all the problems that come to school we're expected to deal with.

Of all the teachers, only Megan -- another Grade 1 teacher, and also the mother of two -- seems least affected by the combination of work and family. She jokes about taking her whole lunch hour to visit with the other teachers, instead of doing class preparation, of relying heavily on office staff and parent volunteers to help her with her preparation, and of having instituted a language arts program that "almost runs itself." She has taught for the past six years in the same school, and for about half that time she has taught Grade 1. She has no plans to make any changes. Asked if her job was harder to do with a baby at home, she comments:

> I don't think so. No, I wouldn't say it was harder, not the job itself. It was certainly a change of lifestyle having to always think, well, I really should be getting out of here now because I have to go pick him up to get him home. He's been at the babysitter all day, he shouldn't have to stay late. There was, I guess you could call it a bit of a guilt. But more because I want to spend time with him too, not just because I feel he's spent so many hours at the babysitter.

Along with the need to leave work promptly and get home on time are concerns about productivity. Helene's conviction that she's doing her job less well now is translated into more pragmatic terms by Tania:

> I usually leave the house around eight and I usually get home around six. Before I had [her child] those hours were a lot longer, but now . . . You have to work smarter. . . There's another lady I work with, she's not married . . . She's a manager of another branch, a bigger branch. And she works way more than I do. Her performance level is a bit higher than me, but that's the trade-off. That's the decision I've made.

The division of labour at home

The division of household work and child care is a critical issue for women who work full-time outside their homes. All the women had demanding jobs, and most had had some conflict with their husbands or partners about the household division of labour. Only three seemed clearly to have achieved an arrangement that didn't leave them with either all the work or all the responsibility for delegating the work. In two of these three families -- Mona's and Helene's -- the women were the main breadwinners and the men were responsible for most of the housework and childcare. Helene recalls her husband's almost complete lack of involvement in her first pregnancy -- and the transformation that occurred in him when the baby was born. Even when he was still working full-time, he was, Helene reports, "absolutely marvellous".

> [The baby] was also quite fussy as a little [one], and he was very good, he'd come home from work and walk her for hours. [And] would get up through the night even if he had to go to work and I was at home. He surpassed

> all my wildest expectations of what he would be as a father . . .

Bonnie's partner also took responsibility for child care for their first child from the time he was about six months old until he was about two. At the time he was working an evening shift, so he took the "day shift" with the baby. He continues to participate fully in the children's activities, arranging with his employer to be able to attend the noon-hour Christmas concert and spending time in his younger child's play school class.

Bonnie's was the only dual-earner family that seemed truly egalitarian in the division of housework also. Bonnie herself was aware of how unusual her circumstances were. Asked about her partner's role, she jokes: "I don't want to tell you because someone will try and take him away from me!" Then she explains:

> We share the responsibilities. In the mornings I'll get the kids washed and dressed and downstairs, in the mean time he's made breakfast and lunches and bagged the lunches. . . He has a later start time, he drives them to the sitter's. . . So then at the end of the day, I pick them up, take them home, listen to their day, start supper. If there's a little bit of homework, whatever, we gather around the table, have a little time together And then, finish making supper. I'll do things like the laundry, he'll do the bathrooms, he dusts, I'll vacuum.

It wasn't always this balanced. Bonnie recalls the early days of their family life when he would "just sit":

> Of course we had a couple of heated arguments and he said, I am not against doing anything and I agree with everything you say but I'm just not aware. You tell me and I will do it and I'll be more than happy. And I said O.K., but after a while I don't want to have to tell you every time. I want you to have to start to look -- 'Oh, I see this has to be [done].' And I would say it took a good two and a half years. But this is to the point we're at . . . And he didn't always dust, he used to be the vacuumer, I used to do the bathrooms and he used to do laundry and sometimes you need to rotate these things. And we both agree it can be 50-50.

In both Kate's and Tania's families, parental work schedules are such that the children are cared for by their fathers on one day of the mother's working week. But the sharing falls well short of the egalitarian arrangement Bonnie and her partner have achieved. Kate comments: "He's pretty good, but not 50-50."

Tania's circumstances suggest the ways in which unequal sharing becomes an entrenched pattern. At home on maternity leave with a very colicky baby, Tania needed help, but felt she had to handle the baby on her own.

> You know, he's got a job to do. This is my job now, and he's got his job and he needs his sleep. . . He's not a Mr. Mom type at all. You know, he would cook the odd meal, but he didn't cook all the meals. . . There were some days where we didn't have a meal. We had toast or something. . . And some days, just to have a meal prepared was a thing I could do, other than a load of laundry or something.

Back at work full-time, they "split" the work. But the split left her doing most of the housework, until they hired a maid.

> The maid comes in every two weeks. . . Because we were always fighting about housework and, you know, we'd have one fight every second weekend about housework and I felt guilty about leaving the house with a maid in it. I felt, God, I should be able to this on my own. Or we should be able to do this on our own. But mainly it was me . . .

The sharing of child care responsibilities is also not equitable. A sick child is a major problem for Tania and her husband, because a sick child cannot go to day care and there is nobody at hand to act as an emergency caregiver.

> This is one thing we don't really agree on, is who should be looking after him when [he's] sick. He feels he would be the laughing stock of work if he -- laughing stock is a bit extreme, strong, but . . . if he tells the guys he's having to take time to babysit his son they are going to kind of think, hmmm. You know as far as career.

"We share the child care!" says Laura, when asked about the sharing of childcare and housework in her household. Though non-traditional to the extent that she and her partner are not married, she sees their household falling into very traditional patterns in other ways.

> I just see things happening like, I'm in the house doing the housework and he's out mowing the lawn, and I'd rather it be the other way round. But it just, it happens, and you don't consciously think that, you know, this is what I'm going to do and this is what he's going to do. It just happens . . . I'm bathing [her child] or something like that, I'm up there doing it while he's down watching TV!

Any help she gets, she has to ask for.

> Whenever I ask that he helps, or participate in the child care, he does. But usually . . . he doesn't just get in there and do it, it's usually a nudge.

The division of leisure time can also sometimes be problematic. Kate, now in the last trimester of her second pregnancy, used to play baseball in summer and basketball in winter for personal recreation. Her husband plays hockey, and golfs. She plans to resume her sports when the baby is born. "I've always made sure that I've had a life," she says. In Bonnie's family, leisure time seems to be as equitably handled as housework and childcare. One night a week Bonnie bowls. One night a week her partner plays volleyball. One night a week they play volleyball together. But not all the households are so even-handed. Frequently, an inequitable division of leisure time is the inevitable consequence of an inequitable division of household work. Women who have children and who work full-time in paid employment tend to forego personal time, because whatever time they have free from paid work and home work commitments they prefer to spend with their children. Laura comments:

> I could make time for really anything but I choose not to make time for a lot of outside things because, I don't know if I feel guilty about not being there for [her child] a lot but I just choose to spend most of my time with her. Or if I'm doing something with other people she comes along. . . So I have as much time as some of my friends who are Friday nights off to the bar and the kids are with their grandparents or something but I just choose not to do that.

Tania says:

> I don't find I have a lot of time for me right now. It's work, it's my work, it's [her child], it's my husband, it's my house and as far as time for me, I mean, I might have one or two nights in the month that I might do something for me. But, you know, you give a

lot of that up initially, I think.

Mona, as well as being the major breadwinner for her family, takes her parenting responsibilities seriously; the combined demands of work and family leave her with "way too little" time for personal pleasures like reading, sewing or exercising.

> I'm really fairly clearly concentrating on family right now. I'm not much for social events or anything. . . I'm being pretty tough. In fact I'm really trying to keep my hours solid so that I know I'm consistently home right now.

Once home, she spends time with her children on activities that, she feels, complements her partner's involvement with them. He takes them to parks and playgrounds and spends a lot of time with them outdoors. She handles the "intellectual part" -- reading, crafts, helping them write stories. Both partners share the children's bedtimes, and they share basic discipline.

The need to change some patterns to make room for children's needs is less evident among male partners who work full-time. Tania is grateful for the fact that her husband gives up his Saturdays to care for their child while she works. But on the other hand, "his life hasn't changed that much". And a partner's willingness to share the workload when he's home is no help if he's seldom home. Megan comments:

> When he's home we do split tasks pretty well. More often than not he's got the responsibility of the older one . . . I told him quite flatly, I mean, these kids are our kids. I will not take sole responsibility for them. I mean, we both want these children, we both will be responsible for day and night shifts. And he is good . . . [We] trade off as much as we can. And he's been feeling really bad the last little while because he has been at so many meetings. He's sort of like, 'I'm never home.' I think he's kind of noticed a couple of times too because he's been seeing some changes in our little one. 'Oh, look what he's doing.' And I say, he's been doing that for a while. But he just hasn't been home regularly enough to see it and I think he's really started to notice it. As well as the fact that we had one very serious discussion, to put it politely, a couple of weekends ago where I said, look, when you *are* home you're not doing anything enough. I can't do it all by myself. And he finally realized just how much he was expecting me to do and has made a concerted effort to make up for it.

Megan has now started going to a regular exercise program twice a week, because, as she explains it, she has been "putting out" for everyone else in the family for the last two or three years and "I've got to start looking out for me."

Career consequences

The women interviewed here are doing different kinds of jobs, in different work environments. And they are at different stages in their family lives. For example, Mona, Carla and Bonnie are all over 35, and all have two children, at least one of whom is now in school. Though Bonnie and her partner are considering adopting a third child, Mona and Carla do not plan more children. Their working lives will now proceed without the interruptions of maternity leave.

The other women are all at what Tania describes as the "baby-making" stage. One is on maternity leave, two more will be on maternity leave in six months, another plans a pregnancy in a year. What happens to women's careers as they pass through this "baby-making" stage to the point where they know they will be able to work not only full-time but without any further time out?

In the most general sense, the presence of children seems to preclude the taking of career risks. For example, Laura is trapped in a job she doesn't like because her child commits her to putting financial security ahead of her own career goals. More specifically, however, the "baby-making" stage is seldom a time of career advancement. In most cases, this was not viewed as a problem. Three of the teachers -- Megan, Helene and Bonnie -- had already achieved their career goals and were not looking for more advancement. Kate and Tania, however, were both aware that their stage of family life was having a direct impact on their careers. In Kate's case, the teaching assignment to which she returned after her first maternity leave consisted of fragments pieced together to make the full-time teaching job to which her contract entitled her. She was given responsibility for special education, and for some classes in Grades 1, 2 and 6. She comments:

> When I go back for the last time, then I would maybe be a little bit more assertive and say, this is what I want. [For now, though, work is] a big part of my life,

> but it's not *as* big . . . So I'm not concerned, really. Because I'm doing my job, and I think I'm helping out where I'm needed right now.

Tania consciously planned not to have children until she had been made a manager, because she felt the presence of children would limit her chances of becoming one. She comments:

> I really don't feel my chances of promotion now are that great. Because in their eyes, my feeling anyways is, I'm in the baby-making stage . . . Plus, there's not a lot of promotions going on, there's cutbacks. So, you know, I wanted to be at that level and as far as I'm concerned if I stay at this level for the next five years it's fine with me. . . I'm not really sure, after this level, what I'm going to do with the bank. It's kind of, middle management, there's a lot of people at the same level and in order to get promoted you have to be the cream of the crop. And it's very difficult to be the cream of the crop when you're at a stage of your life when you're raising small kids . . . Unless you are willing to give up all your personal time, which I am not.

But career/family conflicts are not resolved when the baby-making stage is left behind. The demands, but also the pleasures and rewards, of a growing child in the family, frequently generate a change in priorities and a willingness to slow the pace of career advancement. Carla, whose children are now 11 and four, and whose career progress has been meteoric, feels pushed and hurried. Devastated by the birth of her first child, she was ready for her second, planned pregnancy, when having children was "more of the focus". When her second child was born,

> I had had all I could take of promotions. . . Some of the promotions weren't ones that I wanted to take at the time. I wasn't ready. I was quite content where I was. But I was sort of encouraged to do that. . . And at that point it seemed like everything was coasting quite well. And I was not back to work six months [after maternity leave] and it started again. . . They said, they're having another competition and I was told on the side that I am to apply for this position, so I did.

Carla's career is advancing well beyond her aspirations, which are limited now by the demands of her family. Most of the other women were also willing to stretch time-lines and put careers on hold while their children were young. For example, Kate thought she might be interested in educational administration, but "years from now, once the kids are bigger." She would also consider completing a Masters degree by distance education.

> It would take a long time to do it that way, but, you know, that's all right. I'm not in a big hurry. I'm not going anywhere.

Megan sees little change in her working life in the years ahead, and a family focus to her activities.

> I have intentions of getting involved in what the boys are involved in. If they want to join [Beavers], I want to become actively involved in being part of that . . . Since I'm working all day this is how I will spend and develop my quality time by showing an interest and getting involved in the things that they're doing. If they want to get involved in any kind of sports or something, if anything I'll at least be the mom who's there every day watching the games and cheering them on.

Work, family and ideologies of motherhood

All the women, when interviewed, were working full-time but would have preferred either part-time work or no paid employment at all. Those who expressed the greatest disquiet were those -- notably Bonnie, Helene and Laura -- who felt that by working full-time, they were unable to be the kinds of mothers they wanted to be.

Not everyone experienced this conflict. Kate, for example, looking ahead to the imminent arrival of her second child, said it "might be nice" to work part-time. But this has nothing to do with her views on mothering.

> I think I can be just as good a parent if I go to work. Different, but just as good. . . I know other people that have stayed home and they've got these kids that cling on. I'm not saying that's not good. Well, I'm not saying that staying at home is not good, but . . . I don't feel guilty, or anything.

Mona would like a break to give herself some time for reflection, and to research other job possibilities -- not necessarily to be home with her children. The children's need to have a parent at home has already been met by Mona's partner, who stayed home to provide child care for several years. Both Mona and her partner are "super-happy" that this was possible: "I just think that their security, their emotional security, is very solid". But in a family where traditional gender roles have been reversed, Mona's view of her family, and herself in it, is predictably non-traditional also:

> [Family] is very important. I think when it comes down to crunches I put that ahead of work. If it's a case of sickness or if I thought a child needs me for a while I'll really do everything I can to do that. On the other hand, I have been fairly practical about it in just saying, well, you know, parents work . . . And I think it's been a really good role model for the [kids]. They really identify with coming to work and they know that's an interesting thing to do.

Much more traditional views, and an accompanying dissatisfaction with the status quo, are expressed by Laura, Bonnie and Helene. Laura comments:

> I would just like to raise [her child] the way I guess I was raised and my mom was always home with us kids. And I remember feeling so secure . . . It was just nice to come home at lunchtime during school, and just know that your mom was always around. And I would like for [her child] to have that. . . I just think back to the fifties, the sixties, the seventies where the moms were at home, and they were sewing and cooking and, that's the type of thing that I remember and that's what I would like to be like even though I'm not like that at all, I don't sew and I don't really love cooking. But, that would be my perfect model.

Bonnie, who is feeling "sick and tired," also wants to be home with her children. She tells a powerful story from her past as she explains her thinking:

> My mom was a teacher. She was married and had two children and stayed at home and then I was born, and apparently, I don't remember this, I was two years old, she had picked up a teaching job and she was teaching and my dad was working and they had a lady that would come in and look after me. . . Anyways, the lady, caregiver, fell asleep on the chair. It was a September day, I went walking downtown. When the police finally found me . . . they said, 'Where are you going?' and apparently I said, 'Looking for my mom'. Now, I'm getting all emotional, but I don't even

remember it.

What she does acknowledge, now, are strong feelings that for her, though not for every woman, staying at home with her kids is the "right thing."

> I would like to have the experience, for a while of looking after the home, the family . . . The focus is always the three of them. You know, it's the home, the three of them. . . . . And I just think that being at home, it would be less stress, you know and [I would get more] for the family. They would be easier on me, it would be, this time in my life I guess would be more enjoyable. . .

For Helene, the change of focus has come slowly, as her children arrived and grew. From feeling "non-maternal" and impatient to be back at work after her first maternity leave, she experienced "a very big turn-around" with her second pregnancy. For one thing, after a first pregnancy that was only "semi-planned," this time she "really wanted another child very badly". Now she is thoroughly enjoying her second maternity leave, and could see herself staying at home until both children were in school. Failing that, she would like part-time work, but as a teacher working during a time of education cutbacks is unwilling to risk the job security she has now. So with nine more months of maternity leave, she is concentrating on enjoying the present -- driving her older child to playschool, to skating and the library, participating in a weekly moms' group, reading to the children and providing them with "as many enriching things, or things that I perceive to be enriching, as I can." She comments:

> I was holding [the baby] yesterday morning, about seven o'clock, at the window. And people were brushing off their cars and getting ready to go to work. And it was just daybreak. It was beautiful, the snow was coming down. And I just felt overwhelmed with happiness, sort of, at being able to be home, and not having to go out . . . Feeling I guess maternal.

For Tania and Carla, the traditional image of the "good mother" is hard to accommodate to the successful non-traditional careers both have developed. It is these two women who seem to have the greatest difficulty deciding how work and family should be combined. Tania enjoys and is successful at her job, and complains of the inequitable division of labour in her home. Yet she describes her role in her parents' house as that of the traditional eldest daughter, the "responsible one," always helping with housework and with younger children, sleeping beside her baby sister's crib and having to hold her hand every night so she would go to sleep. Of her present family situation, she says:

> As far as raising the children, I think I want to do it. Not that I think it is my job. I want to do it. And I know I'm doing a good job already and I enjoy doing it.

Her own mother worked full-time, and she says she "missed out a bit" because of that. In her husband's family, the mother stayed home and the father was the major breadwinner. Now she wants "our family to be more like his family". Throughout the interview she veers between her liking for her work, her desire to be home with her children, and her uncertainty about how her dilemma will be resolved.

> At this point, we have equal careers. You know, we expect, not that I don't expect big things of me, but I see a lot of potential in him too. And [his employer] sees a lot of potential in him. . . I want to have the option, I would love to have the option of doing what I want with my life. I don't at this point really feel I have that option as far as family and work. You know I feel that I have to work right now to continue the lifestyle that we want. And we're not prepared to just not go on holidays and scrimp and save and all this all the time. We have a good life, we are able to save money. But I would love the option one day of not having to work if that's what I choose, or say doing something totally different. . . I expect his career to be bigger than mine. I want it to be bigger than mine, in the next little while.

Carla considers she has "too much on her plate" right now. She would like to work fewer hours to accommodate her family responsibilities, and with her boss's approval submitted a proposal to reduce her working day to six hours. The proposal was refused because she was a manager. Yet for Carla, with one child already in school and one soon to start, staying home is not the answer. She sums up her dilemma:

> It's not the end of the world. . . If it was, I'd quit. Because my husband does work. And he makes a fairly good income, you know so I could quit. I mean it's not that I don't have any choice. But I love this business. And even though I wish I didn't work 40 hours a week I love the business and I don't want to stay

> home all the time. You know? So is it a choice or is it not a choice? Depends on how you look at it.

The women interviewed in this chapter clearly indicate the lines of struggle involved in combining full-time work with their responsibilities as mothers. For most of them, the demands are perceived to be too great -- and no job seems immune. The teachers in the group -- traditionally considered to have an easier time in terms of working hours and holidays -- are for the most part just as stressed. All the women would prefer to be working fewer hours -- but this is an option that is in effect only available to the teachers, who are generally unwilling to risk their present job status in an insecure economic climate. For the women in other work, the possibility of leaving their jobs altogether is not an acceptable alternative. It would require them to give up, not only their financial independence (and a significant proportion of family income) but also an investment of time, energy and care and a sense of themselves as competent career professionals. But if they must cope with intransigent and inflexible workplaces, some of them must also cope with intransigent and inflexible partners, who are unwilling to share family work even thought their paid employment is no more demanding than their wives'. In fact it is noteworthy that in none of these families can the woman's job be described on economic grounds as clearly secondary or less privileged. Finally --

and again in spite of the importance of their paid employment for their families -- several of these women must also contend with the conflict generated by their own desire to fulfil a more traditional mother role.

All of these women see part-time work as a solution to their dilemma -- yet part-time work is for them not an available option. Women who *are* able to combine motherhood and part-time paid employment are described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

MOTHERING AND PART-TIME PAID WORK

For the mothers in full-time paid employment who were the subject of the last chapter, part-time work was seen as the ideal, though unattainable, means of balancing paid work and family responsibilities. What all of them aspired to, however, was a reduction to part-time hours in the challenging, well-paid professional jobs they currently held. That part-time work in real life is seldom so attractive has been noted in Chapter 2 (for example, Duffy and Pupo, 1992). That part-time work in effect institutionalizes women's full responsibility for family work has also been demonstrated. Why it was chosen by the several women in the study, and how well it suited them, is described below.

Five of the women interviewed in depth chose to combine family responsibilities with formally scheduled part-time work outside the home. At the time of the interviews, one had three children, two had two children, one had one child and was pregnant with her second, and one had one child with plans for a second pregnancy in the near future. The children in this group ranged in age from eight years to 14 months.

Though all five women were working part-time at the time they were interviewed, their collective experiences of combining work and family life had also in most cases included periods of full-time paid work, and periods out of the work force on extended maternity leave.

LINDA, 31, is a commerce graduate who later took further training and became a nurse. At the time she was interviewed, she had one child aged 19 months, and was six months pregnant. She had been working half-time at a city hospital before the birth of her first child; she took about a year of maternity leave, then returned to similar part-time duties at the same hospital.

HILARY, 34, is an arts graduate with extensive interests in the arts. She lives with her husband and two children, aged seven and five, outside a small town. She works part-time as a teacher assistant, teaching English as a Second Language. The job, which she was offered by virtue of her university extension course in ESL, is part of a creative working life made up of a collage of paid and unpaid projects.

MARIE, 37, is an education graduate with three children aged eight, four and two. She teaches French in an elementary school two afternoons a week, a commitment which represents one-tenth of a full-time teaching job. She also makes use of her teaching experience in a range of volunteer activities, many of them connected to her children's school and extracurricular programs.

SANDRA, 31, is an education graduate with two children aged four and two. She worked full-time until her first child was born, took about seven months' maternity leave, then returned to work part-time for five months to finish off the school year. The following fall, she worked full-time for seven months, then took four months' maternity leave at the birth of her second child. She returned to a part-time teaching appointment and has been teaching part-time ever since.

GAIL, 30, is a science graduate who took a Masters degree in Communications Sciences and Disorders, an American qualification which enabled her to work as a speech pathologist. She worked full-time until her baby, now 14 months, was born. She took six months' maternity leave, then returned to work three days a week at the rehabilitation hospital where she had worked before.

The decision to work part-time

For these women, by far the most important reason for choosing part-time paid employment was that it kept work options open at a time when the major focus was on their families. For the teachers, both of whom had permanent teaching contracts, the part-time work kept the contracts alive -- even though Marie, for example, works only one-tenth of a full-time position. Linda works her half-time nursing shifts to keep up her registration. Gail works her three-day week at least partly to help pay for memberships in the various professional associations to which she felt she needed to remain connected. Her comments about her work sum up several important themes for this group:

> My job is important but my home life and my personal life is more important. And I didn't want to spend more time at work than at home. . . I thought to myself too how tired I would get working full time and, you know, the house and doing all these different things that I just thought it wouldn't be fair to everyone involved because I couldn't do it. I couldn't keep myself working well, doing things at home, being mom and wife and happy with everything. I just knew I wasn't the type to do that.

This statement suggests, first, the clear priorizing of family over paid work. Second, there is the implicit assumption that there has to be time left over from any paid work to take care of all the family work as well.

Marie's circumstances indicate why a shift to part-time paid work might be necessary. She recalled the year, just before the birth of her third child, when she was working full-time:

> (Her husband) just seemed to be travelling all over and working long hours, and I found that year to be terribly difficult, you know . . . I felt as though I was working and then I'd come home and I couldn't stop working because I'd have to put the kids to bed and bathe them and make supper and there was no help. . . And I guess he was growing with his profession, seniority, and he was taking on more responsibility . . . so he was putting in more time. And I said, well, if you're going to spend time on your job, I have to give, because somebody has to look after the family. And I said we can't both have a career, a strong career because something will suffer, and it will be our family.

The division of family work

For Linda and Hilary, this traditional division of labour is more of a practical than an ideological choice, since both have partners willing to assume their share of the family work load. Linda's work history has been chequered from the start. Frustrated by her inability to find a good job with her commerce degree, she entered a two-year graduate nursing diploma program in 1988. Her one and only full-time nursing job lasted about four months before she was laid off in the course of the ongoing restructuring and "downsizing" of hospital nursing staff. In addition, fertility problems requiring drug treatment made it necessary to start her second (and final) pregnancy soon after her first, which had ended in traumatic childbirth complications and ongoing health problems. Linda, in effect, does as much as she can, at work and at home, but her husband is needed -- and is entirely willing -- to do whatever remains undone.

Hilary's work and family history has also been unusual. She had worked for five years before coming to university. As a student, and after graduation, she worked for a native land claims organization, later adding the responsibilities of a single mother as well. Marriage, another child, and a move to a rural centre (where her husband took up a full-time job) disrupted her working life, and transformed her lifestyle from unconventional to more traditional.

> That's the last thing I expected. For all I knew I'd be in Tibet by now. I certainly didn't expect to be living this sort of life. Especially with the male partner working and myself taking care of the two kids and the dog. It's like total irony, because I've always been fairly radical. I'm sure it's the last thing he expected too. . . It'll last as long as the kids last, and then I'm sure I'll go back to being unconventional.

Hilary and her husband have reversed roles before, and she considers that another reversal is due. She comments: "We've got a pretty good relationship that way, we'll switch off. . . In fact, it's my turn, by far. He's done a lot, for quite a while." The assumption in this family is that one partner has the "good job," while the other does most of the family work. But the switching off ensures that the family work is not *always* Hilary's responsibility.

For Sandra, Marie and Gail, however, family work is predominantly women's work. Husbands are described as "helpers," more or less willing (and able) to be deputies or emergency replacements, but never taking full responsibility. For example, Sandra comments that her husband "helps me out a lot, thank heavens," He does "a lot of the housework", and "he helps me a lot with the kids." She notes:

> He is very good. But there are things . . . If the kids get sick and the caregiver gets sick . . . he has never said, like, that's your job, but . . . I just do it. And I think he just thinks, well, she's going to find somebody . . . Like, Sandy'll find the solution. This is what she's good at doing or something . . . I would say, although he helps me an awful lot . . . just maybe because I'm here more, I'm with (the children) more, that I do have more responsibility.

Gail greeted a question about how the work is divided in her family with a derisive "Ha!" She offers the observation that she and her husband are "very traditional," and that it is partly her "fault." There are certain things around the house that she prefers to do and so she just does them -- laundry, for example ("I don't think he'd take the care"). Other things she prefers to take care of are "things that might bug me that he might not notice and if it bugs me and he doesn't notice, I don't want to keep nagging about it so I just take care of it."

> I do take on quite a bit. And part of it, I don't know, sometimes I think too with (her husband's) job, it can be very stressful, very demanding and very consuming on his time. He is out early in the morning and often comes home -- well, like 12-hour days are not uncommon. And so, part of me feels like as much as my job can be stressful and demanding and all that, I don't think it is near as much so as his is, so part of me feels -- and I am home an extra couple of days, I try to set things up here to be, not stressful . . . and just kind of make his life a little easier too.

While Gail takes responsibility for making her husband's home life as smooth as possible, it seems that it may be the baby who is, according to Gail, assuming responsibility for getting his father to take on some child care.

> As time has gone on there are things he does sporadically, but not always, you know, like he'll do the bath the odd time, those kinds of things. The one thing is play time after supper, is largely their time, and [the baby] demands it now. . . . He can't really get away with it now, where he can come home and kind of just relax without me saying 'I think you should do something with him.' He demands it.

But involvement with children requires a parent to be physically present. Marie's husband works long hours; she wishes he would spend more time with their children.

> He does spend time with the children . . . It might be a Sunday afternoon that he might take them to a movie, or he might take them to the club . . . He might even drive (their eldest) to school once in a while in the morning, but it's not as much as perhaps some fathers because of his work. And he'll come home maybe at 6:30, 7, and actually he's pretty good at supper time, he always joins us for supper. I should say most times. So, you know, the family is sitting around the table. And he'll help me with putting the kids to bed and reading stories and whatnot. . . . But quite often he works Saturday, sometimes he even works Sunday, and that's where I find it hard.

Child care and ideologies of motherhood

For this group, much more than for the mothers who work full-time, child care outside the family circle represents a compromise that can be more easily rationalized if it is not a full-time arrangement. Gail's comment, cited earlier, about not wanting to be at work more days than she was at home is significant here. Of these five women, four were able to rely heavily on a spouse (Hilary), a mother (Linda and Gail) or a sister (Sandra) for child care at different stages in their working lives. Often this help was available when they first returned to work, leaving their children as babies.

When Linda returned to work half-time, she was "horrified" at having to leave her child, then 11 months old. Her mother cared for her for the first four months, and still helps occasionally. But now Linda shares a babysitter with a friend. The arrangement works well, but she considers herself to be "definitely" the best person to look after her daughter.

> It's nice for her to mix with another little person and she enjoys the children and so, it's been kind of a positive part of having someone else look after her. I do have a definite problem with the control, giving up, I mean I like things sort of a certain way sometimes . . . I don't get bent out of shape but I just recognize that I really like it to be just (her child) and I, we do things this way.

As a nurse working shifts, she has some flexibility in organizing her work time. Her goal is a particular combination of day and evening shifts, and some weekend work, that will require only five or six days a months of childcare provided by someone other than parents.

Gail's parents volunteered (Gail would say pleaded) to care for her child when she returned to work. Even so, the separation was difficult:

> I think the biggest thing was, it's that little bit of letting go, that somebody else can do the job, somebody else take care of him as well as I can . . . The morning I left him to go to work . . . I cried leaving, and I thought, 'My God, I am leaving him with my mother and I'm crying. What would I have done if I had left him with somebody else?' [It] probably would have been horrible. It probably would have taken me days.

But if enlarging the circle of caregivers means giving up some of the care, it may also mean shifting out of the centre of the child's universe. Gail struggles with this inevitability in her own devoted extended family, where even her elderly grandmother walks to her parents' house to visit on days they are babysitting.

> The teaching and the more parenting kind of role I was leery [of] them having to deal with, but I think it's worked OK. There was that feeling when he was a little bit younger. A couple of times when he cried leaving my mom's and coming home, it was really hard. Like I knew that he didn't mean that he would rather be at my mom's or whatever but sometimes there is that feeling of, I don't know if jealousy is the right way to put it but, I think it's hard to let go and realize that [your child] can be cared for to quite an extent by [other people]. . . We are harder on family members sometimes too but that was hard at times where it seemed like my mom was -- not preferred over me but sometimes I almost got that feeling, you know.

Marie acknowledges that her husband's career is sufficiently prosperous that, if she chose, she could have afforded even highly personalized, quality care (a live-in nanny perhaps) and continued to work. But she did not make that choice:

> I feel strongly that I should raise my children, not somebody else. And I guess I'm not that career oriented that I would do that . . . I like to have some time to myself . . . I like to be with my kids. I like to take (the four-year-old) swimming, when we want to go swimming. I think it is important for me to be around the children as much as I can. So it's like the best of both worlds . . . I wanted my children so, I should raise them. But yet I like my career as well and . . . if you can have a balance, I think it's the best thing.

Both of Hilary's children spent some time in day homes as babies, because Hilary needed to work -- after the first child's birth, because she was a single mother, and after the second because she was the partner with the "good job." It took a while to find the right day home, and "once I did it was a good one." But apart from this "outside care" when they were younger, both children have mostly been cared for by one or other parent at home.

> I think actually, even though we didn't necessarily plan it this way, it's worked out really well, because -- well, day cares are just not . . . they may be wonderful day cares or day homes but it's just not quite the same as being at home. And we've been quite lucky on that. And living here too has been quite good. We don't have a TV but we do lots of things, I mean, games and walks and all sorts of stuff. We've managed to make sort of another kind of investment as far as a real tight family unit, we've been quite fortunate in that way.

Why work?

The obligation to make family their prime focus, as well as the pleasure and satisfaction that derives from this focus, is evident in the interviews with each of these women. But for all that family is important, and even where the amount of time they spend on paid work is relatively small, they are generally unwilling to give it up altogether. Work outside the home provides something that family work lacks, and it's different for each woman.

This distinction is perhaps least clear for Hilary, whose work (apart from the temporary teaching position she now holds) mostly consists of arts projects, both paid and unpaid, which are less rigidly separated from her home and family life than paid employment usually is. In this sense, she is perhaps more like the "home-based" mothers described in the next chapter. But for the other four women, the benefit of their ongoing connection to paid work is best described in terms of personal satisfaction and fulfilment, and insurance for the future. Linda has yet to have a really good job. She says that "part of me" still wants that experience:

> I think most of it is . . . how other people see you. I don't know if that's probably shallow or something, but to feel accomplished, or to feel like you have done something really well, or you've worked your way up or achieved something. I mean I know that I have achieved lots personally and nobody else really knows that . . . But to sort of, belong somewhere and to have worked your way up and really have a position. I think some of it is really just status. But in some sense I long for that feeling. Well, belonging and being important to someone other than [her husband and child] . . . And just feeling like I have something to contribute.

For now, though, work provides more modest pleasures:

> I really enjoy the time with (her child), but I do know that I do like to be away sometimes, because I enjoy my friends and the people I meet at work and I feel competent at that job and I'd like to have some of that elsewhere in my life. Like doing diapers and making meals is kind of. . . has to be done but it's nothing I get that much satisfaction from.

Gail, asked what she would lose if she gave up her paid professional work, replied:

> You would lose . . . that professional part of you, I guess . . . that you are someone that people look to for answers or for information or that sort of thing. . . And I guess the realities of . . . working, and the working world, and what's going on out there. I think you can easily kind of lose what's happening out there because you don't have to deal with it. And I think some of the social contact. I mean, some women are probably better than others. I am not a 'let's get together for coffee on a regular basis', I am not that type . . . So I think I would lose some of the social time that you spend with people talking about things. And some of the support . . . in the sense that they are going through the same thing you are -- work, home life, all those sorts of things. . . being able to turn to other people for information . . . both about your job, but about your kids as well . . . You'd have to make an effort to build that through your neighbourhood or through something where at work it's just there.

Sandra shares this pleasure in the social setting of paid work, but also believes it is important to keep in touch professionally:

> I need to be around my peers, I guess is what it boils down to. I am really happy when I'm back. You know, speaking, well, just like we are now, talking to somebody that I can relate to, on my level. And then I really love teaching. . . I definitely enjoy teaching, and I want to keep up on my teaching. There are so many changes going on, I think if you're not there you don't know what's going on.

Marie agrees on the need to keep up the teaching techniques learned over the years, as well as staying abreast of what is happening in education. She also notes that the fact of her teaching enables her own children to see her in a different role. Of her one-tenth position, she comments:

> I'm happy with just this small percentage. And I think it's healthy for me to have sort of this professional part of me that is still working . . . in the schools and having the responsibilities that I have. Now the kids are all doing well. . . If the kids were to have a special problem as they grow up then I probably would resign . . . and then devote myself to my kids. But I think my kids are healthy.

Working in the future

Marie's small part-time job involves the establishment of a French program in her school's upper elementary division. The program began with one grade, but will probably extend to three over three years. Marie is in the unique position of seeing her small part-time job expand by annual increments, in step with the growth of her children, perhaps to something like half-time. "I can see myself growing with this new position," she says. But it is all she wants. Teaching three afternoons a week would be "perfect":

> [It] would allow me time in the morning to look after my household, or participating at (her eldest child's) school volunteering, or even going down to the . . . club for a game of tennis, you know, I think that would be perfect for me. . . I think I'm very lucky that I'm able to do that because some women don't have that choice . . . That would be the best scenario for any person. Part-time work that I enjoy that's not too stressful.

Hilary also sees some benefits in the at-home, caregiver role -- benefits that she wants to share with her husband. Her comment, cited earlier, that it's "her turn" to get the good job is relevant here. Of her time as parent-at-home, she comments:

> It hasn't been *nuts*, and it hasn't been stifling. In a lot of ways I probably have a lot more freedom than he does. He's got the full-time job, he's got to be somewhere. I've been lucky enough to be in a neat place. If I'm involved in [a] project, I just take the kids along. They've gotten really good at adapting to meetings. . .When we first moved here I didn't know anybody, and . . . the youngest was still in diapers, there was a bit of -- what would you call it? -- claustrophobia. But it depends on what you do with your time. Just [because] there's kids around doesn't mean you can't paint or go for walks or anything like that. There's all kinds of ways to be creative. . .

Marie's "best scenario" also appeals to Gail and Sandra. Gail would like to have a second child soon; Sandra is contemplating having a third. Both, like Marie, are keeping their hands in (their registration current, their contracts alive) so that the door to more work, or a full-time job, is open. Discussing the possibility of their husbands losing their jobs, all three noted that they could return to work full-time to put bread on the table. But none of them would want to do so. As Sandra puts it:

> That would be tough. Because I really wouldn't want to do it. I wouldn't want to have to go back full-time with two. But I know if (her husband) was here at home, everything would get done. It wouldn't be as if I'd come home to a pigsty or anything . . . And (he) isn't the type to sit at home either. Whatever happened, he'd be out looking for a job and he'd get something. I'm sure. I know. And then maybe I would just work full-time until we got our feet back on the ground . . .

Marie, Sandra and Gail -- two elementary school teachers and a speech pathologist -- also have in common the fact that they work in traditionally female fields. All three would earn more money by working more. But all are acquiring seniority as part-time workers, and none would be doing very different *work* if they were to switch to full-time jobs. The accommodation of the profession to the needs of the woman, rather than the other way around, is nowhere more clear than in Gail's description of her situation. In a department of more than 40 people, most of them speech pathologists, she estimates that about 90 per cent are women, and "a very high number" are in the 25- to 35-year age group. Seven other women were pregnant at the same time she was.

> So the natural thing is you know you're going to be hiring people, knowing full well they're going to be having families. So they're really good that way, in being able to come back. We've got a high, high number of part-time staff . . . They've been really accommodating . . . My job was there to come back to.

This sort of flexibility would probably also be available to Linda, the nurse, except that she has two reasons for envisaging a different career for herself a few years down the road when her children will be more independent. The first reason is that she has yet to establish a career of any kind, and feels the lack; the second is, like Hilary, to allow her husband the opportunity to take his own time out of full-time work. She is thinking about some combination of her business degree and her nursing experience, perhaps in a field like hospital administration. With a decent job, she would also be prepared to be the main breadwinner.

> I appreciated so much, it was a real . . . gift that he gave me, that stability to go back to school [to complete her nursing training] and to kind of wrestle with a lot of issues that I have dealt with. And he has given me so much space and time to do that, that I would love to do that for him. If that came up I think that would be neat.

What about the loss of her primary caregiver role?

> I'd probably feel some loss because I really do like to be here but I do feel that he is as capable and just as good a parent as I am. . . I would feel like I would be losing out in some ways. . . The kids would be fine, it would be more my giving up my time with them a bit. But I mean, if it was what we needed to do . . . to survive and to keep things on an even keel, that would be fine.

Now, however, she has neither the decent job nor the opportunity to develop one. She sees clearly the gap between wanting, at the individual or interpersonal level, to combine work and family in a particular way, and the structural difficulties which prevent personal plans from being carried out.

> I think I have the ideal husband for that to work but I don't necessarily have the position or the job to do that with. . . What I'm frustrated with is just, I don't want to necessarily give up my career but I can't really do it all now.

The women interviewed in this chapter -- two teachers, a teacher aide, a nurse and a speech pathologist -- are all in traditionally female jobs. Three of the five in effect converted formerly full-time work to part-time work for the same employer when their family responsibilities merited the change. The conversion to part-time work also signalled the clear privileging of the partner's job, and the corresponding assumption of responsibility for family work. But this division is not always irretrievably gendered; in two cases it represented a pragmatic allocation of work and family responsibility which may change in the future.

Whatever the gender ideology, however, the assumption in all these families is that one or other parent needs to be at home most of the time to care for the children. In the cases described above, mothers' work took them out of the home no more than three days a week -- and other family members were frequently able to provide alternate child care. The belief that young children are best cared for at home by a parent is held even more strongly by many of the women described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8

MOTHERING AND HOME-BASED WORK

Little attention is paid in the research literature to professional women who decide to withdraw from formal paid employment to care for their children. Duffy, Mandell and Pupo (1989) have noted that such women are not necessarily more traditional in terms of gender roles than mothers in paid employment. And, as noted in Chapter 2, there is a growing popular literature (for example, Davidson, 1986) which sees the home as the perfect place to combine child care with a variety of lucrative and interesting activities.

The 11 women described in this chapter who are home-based are more diverse, in terms of their work backgrounds, their family circumstances, and their present connections to the working world than the women introduced in the previous chapters. What this group of women has in common is a decision to forego formal, regular paid work, either full- or part-time, with one employer, in favour of staying at home to care for pre-school children. They differ in what else they choose to do at home besides family work. In fact they form a continuum, from the traditional stay-at-home mother with no source of income of her own, to the woman who is running a time-consuming home-based business. And not all of them have been home-based from the time of their children's birth. Two have also been in full-time paid work, and two have worked part-time.

PENNY, 30, is an arts graduate and former teacher, with two children, a two-year-old and a newborn. At the time she was interviewed she was entering her third year of maternity leave, but was not intending to renew her contract when her leave expired. She has had numerous offers of short-term contracts in the field of teacher education, a few of which she has accepted.

CHRISTINE, 30, is a science graduate who worked as a lab technician until the birth of her first child, now five. She now also has a three-year-old and a one-year old. She supplements her husband's income with a variety of home-based activities.

SHELLEY, 31, is an education graduate and former elementary school teacher, who worked full-time for nearly a year after her first child was born, but has been home-based since then. Among many projects aimed at generating some income, she has operated a day-home and done some substitute teaching. Her children are now five and three.

SIOBHAN, 30, is an arts graduate who went on to complete a Masters degree in environmental design. She worked as an urban planner until the birth of her baby, now eight months old. Now she does contract work at home -- most of it supplied by her previous employer.

ANGELA, 30, is an education graduate and former teacher who lives on a farm with her husband and 19-month-old baby. She taught kindergarten part-time after her baby was born, but now works occasional days as a substitute teacher while taking on most of the responsibility for the farm.

LUCY, 36, is a business graduate who worked as a travel agent before going to university. She worked full-time as a sales representative for nearly two years after her first child, now five, was born, but has been home-based since the birth of her second child, now three.

JESSICA, 30, is an arts graduate and former child care counsellor who has two children. She gave up her full-time job with the birth of her first child, now three. Since the birth of her second child, now 15 months, she has been working on a craft-based business from her home.

SUE, 30, is an education graduate and former teacher, who lives on an acreage outside a rural community. She had given up her full-time job when her husband moved to his present position, and was working as a substitute teacher until the birth of her first child, who was almost four at the time of the interview. She has a second child, almost three, and now does only family work.

MELANIE, 31, is a graduate in fine arts, and a former co-ordinator of a children's recreational art program. She has one child, now three, is three months pregnant with her second, and is developing, from home, an art-related business.

ANNETTE, 31, is an engineering graduate who had given up her engineering job to accommodate her husband's work before her first child was born. She now has a three-year-old and an eight-month-old. She operated a day-home, offering full-time child care, for a year after her first child was born, but has not worked in engineering since having children.

DOROTHY, 33, is an education graduate and former teacher. She has one child, aged two, but is also a full-time parent to three step-children, aged 13, 10 and seven. She has done some substitute teaching, and has also earned some money cleaning houses, and selling her crafts.

The decision to be home-based

Seven of these 11 women either gave up their formal connection to paid work around the time they first gave birth, or before they became pregnant. For these women, staying home with their babies represented a strong ideological commitment to provide a particular kind of child care not perceived to be available in any other way. In most, but not all, cases, the decision to take on the home-based caregiver role was made well in advance of the children's arrival. In some cases, the decision appears to have been made on pragmatic grounds. Here the argument is that it is *parental* care that children need, but because the father usually earns the higher income, it makes more sense for the mother to fulfil the caregiver role. Thus, for example, Christine comments that, having done some babysitting for other children periodically, she realized how glad she was to be at home because "it's never the same . . . a babysitter's never the same as mom." But of her husband, she says:

> As far as involvement with the kids, when he comes home he looks after them. Like he's *very, very* involved with the kids that way, it's really nice. Quite honestly, at this point, if I could get a job that makes as much as he is [making], he would stay home with them. He would be quite happy to do that and I think he'd be very good at it too. . . But I'm not in a position where I could get a job to keep us at a point where we are at this point . . . When he said that, he would gladly stay at home, I think he really would, he really would like that. I think some days I'd like it too!

At the other extreme, Melanie sees the primary caregiver role as something that mothers, *because* they are mothers, can do best.

> I think more than anything your instinctive mothering, or your mothering instincts or whatever, become, they're primal and they're first and foremost. It doesn't matter if anything else is going on in the world, you're going to protect and look after your child before anything . . . I feel very -- not possessive, but I think very close. I could be one of those African women that carry their babies around all the time . . . I like the scenario of women working with the children close by. I feel sad when kids are crying for their moms and they have to be dropped off somewhere. Even if the caregivers are excellent caregivers, I still think there is

something about having mom [close] by.

Most of the home-based mothers fell somewhere between these two positions -- convinced of the parental obligation to do the child-raising, convinced that care provided by a parent is superior to any other kind of care, and pretty sure they would do better than their husbands at providing this quality care as well as doing all the housework. Thus Jessica, who worked as a child care counsellor for disturbed adolescents, says she can "see no purpose in life other than raising a healthy individual" -- and that means full-time parental care and control.

> I'm not putting my child in a day care when I can't control the kind of employees that work there. Oh, yeah, there's some wonderful daycares but there's also some horrible ones, and unless I know absolutely every person in there that has contact with my child I'm not putting my child there. . . I need to know that what my children are learning is what my husband and I want them to learn, and their values and morals are what we think are important for them to know. And I don't know that you can always just teach that from the time you pick them up from daycare until the time that you put them to bed and on weekends. I think it takes more than that. . . I mean, a lot of these kids that are in daycares learn more from the daycare people than they do from their parents.

Sometimes the woman's decision to stay at home with her baby was made *after* the birth, and meant an unexpected change in orientation. Siobhan comments:

> We talked about me going back [to work]. Mostly because of financial concerns, obviously. But . . . I don't know, I guess I come from a traditional background, my mother never worked, [her husband's] mother never worked, and neither of my sisters work, they're both at home with their children. I had an idea that that was what I wanted to do, but . . . I wasn't willing to ever give up work altogether. I've worked too hard to get a career to just sort of give it up altogether. But I didn't want to go

> back to the office . . . but I thought, well, maybe I'll feel differently after six months at home. But we discussed it, and once we had [the baby] we couldn't imagine somebody else raising her.

Annette adds:

> It was just a whole new experience . . . I always thought I could go back to work and get somebody to look after my kids and do both, but once I had [her first baby] I thought, no, I don't want to miss all this time with him. So . . . it was just a change of heart.

But what is also notable about this group of women is the extent to which the decision to be home-based mothers is the result of considerations other than ideological ones. Sometimes, the decision was more the result of circumstances conspiring to prevent a woman working. Thus Annette, while experiencing a personal "change of heart" about working, was also in the position of being *unable* to work, even had she wanted to. Her husband had been transferred five times in the previous six years, and another move seemed imminent. As she remarked, "For me to work, it's rather difficult." Penny, already committed to staying at home with her first child, made her decision at least partly because she and her husband wanted their children to be francophone -- "so when you're committed to give your child a language and a culture, your choices in child care are very limited." Christine had been working full-time as a lab technician for a professor at the university where she did her science degree. She had planned to go back to work part-time after the birth of her first child, but her employer was going on sabbatical leave. This meant that the research-related part of her job -- the part she had hoped to continue -- was not going to be available. Shelley, who had worked full-time after her first child's birth, had actually planned to be home-based after the birth of her second. But this decision may have been forced on her in any case -- the baby was born with a hole in his heart, requiring surgery in another province when he was 16 months old. Angela, who worked part-time teaching kindergarten after her first child's birth, gave notice of her intention to resign because she was pregnant with her second. Then she had a miscarriage -- by which time her job had gone to someone else.

Dorothy, a former teacher, married a divorced man with three very troubled children who lived with them full-time. She considered her husband to have many shortcomings as a parent, and saw it as her responsibility to help the children. She entered the situation as a teacher, and a stabilizing force -- roles she thought her husband was not able to play:

> He didn't deal with them. He didn't care for what they were, you know what I mean, to concentrate, O.K., this child is going through this, what can we do, right? He didn't have time to plan those things out and plan their growth and think about that. So when I came that is what I did.

It meant using "calmness and consistency" to deal with the middle child's wild temper tantrums, working on the eldest child's learning problems to the point where she became an honours student, and, finally, giving up her substitute teaching when the youngest child became upset by her absences.

With a two-year-old of her own, she comments: "Now if I were working I would not be able to supply my children with the support that I give them now and the direction."

Never did the combination of external circumstances have more impact than in Lucy's case, however. A business graduate, Lucy worked full-time as a sales representative for a large company until she was nearly due to give birth to her second child. She intended to return to work full-time after four months' maternity leave, but suffered two major blows which caused her to change her mind. The first was a health problem which was not diagnosed right away. She recalls being "just exhausted" -- "all I wanted to do was sleep all day." As for returning to work, "I could never do it." By the time the problem had been recognized, she had already told her employer she would not be back.

The health problem was stabilized within about four months. But three years later Lucy had still not recovered from the second blow -- the devastating discovery that the babysitter to whom she had happily entrusted her first child, and who would also have cared for her second, could in fact no longer be trusted. Just before the birth of the second child, on her way to an appointment, she stopped by the babysitter's home to leave her first child. She discovered seven preschool children watching television in the basement, and no adult on the premises. Though there was a plausible explanation, Lucy also extracted the admission that this was not the first time the babysitter had left children temporarily unattended. "I told her that was unacceptable", Lucy said. "But it was *very* upsetting. It took me a long time to get over."

Lucy's ability to work outside the home was compromised in two other ways. First, her husband, a successful professional, worked such long hours that he was for practical purposes not available to his wife and children. Second, her employer was unwilling to consider the option of part-time work after her second pregnancy.

> When I was intending on going back after the second, I said, is there any way I can work part-time? And he said to me, oh, Lucy, you *are* working part-time. Because . . . he knew, after the first child my focus had changed, although I was making good money and I felt that I was doing a good job. . . But he knew that I wasn't putting in 110 per cent like he expected. . . It was a male-oriented business run by a bunch of MCPs, and they just weren't prepared to be flexible at all. And I thought if they weren't prepared to be flexible, well, I didn't want to work there.

Considering the tradeoffs

Dorothy and Lucy, who are perhaps the most constrained in terms of work choices, are also very clear about trade-offs involved in the decision to be a primary care-giver to very young children. Lucy comments:

> My life really does centre around the kids, and I think, sometimes I feel like I need that. Sometimes I feel like it is meeting my needs and other times I feel very frustrated by the whole thing, and say, you know, I'm a terrible mother, and what am I doing at home, and I should just let somebody else raise them. . . I think that it's meeting my needs because I can stand back and say, this is why I'm doing it, and this is for how long I'm intending on doing it . . . and really it's just a

> little niggle in my life, it's not going to be a big portion taken out of my working days . . . Then there's other times when I really feel like my needs aren't *ever* being met, you know. This is too much for me.

Family work, emotionally satisfying though it may be, is, as Angela and Dorothy both point out, boring when it is all anyone does. It does not provide the sort of intellectual and social satisfaction that most of these women found in their outside jobs. But it also doesn't blend well with the constraints of paid employment. Melanie, whose deep commitment to motherhood has already been noted, is an artist, who as well as struggling to make her own art is running a business from her home. She is also expecting her second child. "What I have to do is balance everything," she says. "Now with another baby I have to balance it so -- I just want to do it all, and I don't have the time." Penny comments:

> I would love to do both if I could. But there are very few jobs that are structured to allow flexibility and . . . compromise. You know, right now I'm nursing, I nursed both my children, and I'm [a] very strong proponent of breastfeeeding and everything else. But how do you breastfeed a child if you can't bring the child along to work? . . . I think there's a lot of room for change there.

Penny called for "the flexibility of being able to work just . . . half-days or quarter-days, or no days at all in some weeks when things are really bad, and picking up the slack later on."

Given that the working world does not operate in this way, the alternative, in Dorothy's terms, is to expect "phases in life that you go through that you bite the bullet."

> It's not going to be the way you want it, you know. Like, there's struggles. I have to give, and this is my part of giving. This is not for me, this is for my children. I mean, there's parts for me . . . but it's for my children and for my family and you know, no, it's not the greatest. I mean, staying home and sewing, you know . . . I would love to be off taking courses and trying . . . different jobs, all kinds of jobs. I would like to venture into different things and see where it is that I can be most useful and happy, so no, it isn't enough, by any means.

On the other hand, it's "exactly fulfilling what I think a family should fulfil," and what she is doing is "taking my responsibility for what my part is."

For at least one of the women, however, the decision to be home-based involves no tradeoff at all. Angela lives on a farm, and does most of the farm work, as well as the family work. This fulfils a long-held dream. "I have everything I want," she says.

The need to work

Given that caring for children and homes often "isn't enough," given also that these women all have university degrees and had all done various kinds of full-time paid professional work before becoming home-based mothers, it is not surprising that all but one of them still have some kind of money-making work. Only Sue, a former teacher, has no independent income and apparently no social activities outside her home and family.

There seem to be four main reasons why these women take on home-based work: extra money; social stimulation through contact with the wider world outside of home and children; professional satisfaction; and the need to feel valued for something other than their mothering skills. While these reasons collectively represent the motivation to work within the group, they operate in different combinations for different women.

Jessica, the former child care counsellor, decided after she weaned her second child that she would explore work possibilities.

> [Her husband] and I started thinking about, maybe I should start working part-time. Just get out of the house, [the baby] is old enough, I'm not nursing him any more, I have no more excuses to stay home, there's no reason why I can't have a bit of a life outside the home.

She applied for part-time work as a salesperson at a neighbourhood department store, which would offer the added bonus of an employee discount on the children's clothing. The plan was to time her shifts for the early evening when her husband would be home to care for the children.

> I don't want to pay for a babysitter unless I absolutely have to because nobody would be good enough. And if they were good enough they would cost too much money. But, so we wanted to try to find something that I could do without disrupting our lives too much. More importantly without disrupting the children's lives too much.

While waiting to hear from these applications, she decided to work on a longer-standing idea for a craft-oriented gift business which she could operate from home. It is the business which is now her main work focus. She has a workshop in her basement. Most of her suppliers deliver to her door. She delivers the finished product with children in tow, if necessary. It is "a perfect, perfect job." Jessica summarizes her reasons for wanting to work as follows:

> One is money, no question, because living on one income nowadays is hard. . . The other thing is an opportunity for me to get back out into the world outside of this house. Not just with my friends that I choose to see whenever I want to see. But back into business and feeling like a professional . . . like I count to more than just my husband, my family and my kids . . . Not that I feel that I need a purpose in life or whatever, because I think I have that, but just some sort of a, I don't want to say self-worth because that's not right either, I get most of that from my kids, but something more, something more than my kids, more than my husband, more than my family, more than his family, something more . . . Something so that when I go to my next high school reunion I can say, I own my own business.

Siobhan is an urban planner who resigned from her full-time job when her baby was born, and who now does contract work from home for her former employer. She sees several advantages in "keeping her hand in" with her professional work.

> One of the things that I like about continuing to work is the access to what is such an incredibly fast-growing thing which is the computer industry . . . I *want* to stay on top of computers and how to use them and what to do with them, and it's so fast, that if I was to leave all contact with the working world I think that I would lose touch so quickly . . . I mean, you could go away for a *year* and you wouldn't know which end was up on a computer in some cases . . . But it's much more personal for me, [it's] not career . . . I think today a lot of women feel guilty about staying home . . . There isn't the same sort of respect for women who are at home who are homemakers as there used to be in my mother's day . . . [I] need to feel like I'm still a valuable part of society, and

> that's so stupid because I know that I'm a valuable part of society raising a child. But there's a stigma attached to it and you can't avoid that, I guess. I also want to have [some] financial independence and I've always felt that . . . that's very important to a healthy relationship. . . I also think it's very good for . . . the way you deal with a child. To be able to walk away from that child, and sit down and deal with something completely different and unrelated to that child, and I think it gives you some distance and some perspective and the ability to come back and look at it all again . . .

Shelley worked full-time as a teacher after the birth of her first child in order to help make the down-payment and meet the mortgage on her house. She always knew her financial contribution to the household was essential, but negotiated a deal with her husband whereby she could make her share -- ideally the monthly house payment -- from home. She took on a collection of small ventures -- tutoring, selling an educational product through presentations to household "parties," some substitute teaching, and some babysitting. She even invited all the preschoolers on the block to a morning "playschool" at her house once a week, at $2 a child. Only the substitute teaching took her out of the house during the day, and it was sporadic. Finally, feeling that she was torn in too many directions (and not making enough money in any of them) she settled for full-time babysitting, and ran a day-home. With a "full house," she made the money she needed, and there were other advantages as well:

> Actually my [children] seemed to be better when there were other kids there, because when they'd go outside to the sandbox, if there was just the two of them, they probably wouldn't. . . But three of them, and they're all out there for a long time. . . It was company for the

> kids. And I thought, you know, if I've got two anyways, making lunch anyways, I'll just make a bit more. . . The best part though was when I got to know some other babysitters. Because eventually I joined an agency. I was a little bit forced into doing that, but then I was glad because I met other babysitters. Because I felt, I was so isolated. . . And that way, we went to the park together, [say] -- and then through the winter when it was so cold we went to each other's houses. Once a week we'd go somewhere . . . It was really good.

Christine also weaves a variety of different little jobs into her family work. Several young relatives pay her to tutor them in math and chemistry. She also knits and sells elaborately patterned sweaters. And she has a supervisory-type job with an organization that sells cosmetics through personal orders. The tutoring is sometimes more duty than pleasure. But her other work is the reverse. "The knitting I enjoy. I do that when I watch TV. When I watch TV I'm knitting, I can't ever just watch it without -- so I tend to watch the soaps in the afternoon because then I can knit!" The supervisory job offers something different again. She began it for some extra money, because she's her own boss, and because "people are needing me for something other than wiping a nose and changing a diaper."

> Talking to somebody about something different that's not kids. Because I find that, right now, I love my children dearly, but you get together with friends. . . and that's all the topic is, is your kids, you know. And that's what I really like about . . . getting out and talking about business-wise, taking care of my business. I have to keep an inventory, I have to balance my own chequing account, which I have again, which is really nice to have again -- I didn't realize I'd missed it until I got one. You know, and to have my own money to do things. Mind you, my husband has never been that I can't spend the money when I want to, but when you're part of a relationship you have to do it together, that's the only way it'll work,

> you know. So this is nice, to be able to do that, to sort of have control, I think, again.

For Penny, a former language arts teacher, maternity leave opened up new professional opportunities as her services were sought to evaluate, and also teach, teachers-in-training. The evaluation and the teaching -- a teleconference course taught by a panel of instructors, of whom she is one -- all involve short-term contracts. Contract work, she points out, "is very interesting, it's great on a curriculum vitae, but if you're doing it for financial reasons, I mean, forget it." Profits can go in babysitting and gas -- and, in her case, in the tendency to work many more hours on preparation that the job actually calls for. But that's not why she does it.

> I was very fortunate in that I'm still involved in the teaching profession but from a different perspective which was one of my options, my dreams, before I had left on maternity [leave]. But not in a degree that I would have to sort of negotiate, you know, how, who is going to take care of my children. [It was] short enough that my mother could say, 'Sure I'll help you out' . . . And yet I could still dabble in my profession. . . I really like being in a position where I think I can make a difference, that I might influence somebody. And so working with student teachers especially . . . at a point in their careers where they're very open to any kind of suggestion, that, depending on the experience they have then can change them completely and forever as teachers is really exciting.

Angela likes the little bit of money her occasional substitute teaching brings, because among other things it allowed her to buy her husband's Christmas present without drawing on their joint chequing account and having him know how much she spent. But the main reason is to get out of the house, "have fun with the kids" ("I love subbing") and then leave at four o'clock with the job done, no preparation left to do for the next day, and no residue of worry or responsibility to take home with her. It also does not interfere with her major work interest, the farm. Annette, a former engineer, was looking forward to starting some high school math tutoring in the coming school semester. It would mean "a little extra money and I can set my own hours and work around the kids". But it would also mean doing something with her brain, which she joked was "turning to mush."

By far the most ambitious attempt to combine home-based paid work and family life was made by Melanie, who resigned from a job co-ordinating children's recreational programs to start a business of her own offering similar services. Though the actual program delivery takes place outside, Melanie's basement office is the heart of the business, and her home telephone is her link to clients. Because of her passionate commitment to being in close proximity to her child, she faces the extra challenge of having to juggle her professional work around her daughter's needs and her constant physical presence. The result is that the work cannot be compartmentalized into a particular place or, more importantly, a particular time. Though she describes herself formally as working part-time, in fact she is "working all the time" -- days, evenings, and weekends.

> I receive phone calls all day long and all evening, from co-ordinators, from principals, from teachers, from

> parents, from instructors. I'm on the phone a lot of the time. My little girl, she's really wise to this now. So she takes things and throws them at the phone cord, or -- she doesn't like me on the phone any more. . . It's difficult sometimes because phone calls really do take up a lot of my time. My paperwork sits there because I'm always on the phone. And I also teach [noon hour classes] as well. So I have my own classes to look after. . . If I have a spare minute, I usually spend that with my little girl. But I tend to work, if I'm on the phone I may have the cordless phone to my head while I'm doing dishes . . . or I'll be doing the laundry while I'm thinking about a meeting or preparing something in my mind.

The obvious difficulties of working this way are not lost on Melanie. She points out that she could have chosen to work full-time, and in fact was asked to apply for a position which was secure and would have paid well. But it did not have what, for all its drawbacks, her home-based job offered, namely the flexibility to be working near her child. "If she's crying, then I can go soothe her, and she knows that her mommy's there. And if a principal phones me I can deal with them, and not have to be at a certain place at a certain time."

A day in the (family) life . . .

Melanie's days, as described above, are characterized by a blurring of professional and family work and a sense that the work is never-ending. Jessica, the other woman in the group who operates a business out of her home, has more discretion in choosing when she works. But because she puts her family work first, she occasionally finds herself working until one or two o'clock in the morning on the products she sells. Shelley, who operated a day home, was also using her home as her workplace. In her case, the daily occupancy of the house by several extra children meant more housework -- and less time free of child supervision in which to do it.

The women whose work took them outside the home were either able to take their children along, or required occasional childcare -- but mostly the disruption seemed minimal for all concerned. For many home-based women, however, family or volunteer work expands to fill the space which might have gone into paid employment. Time not spent in paid work is often spent meeting, one way or another, other people's needs. As a group, they are in many ways as busy -- and as stressed -- as women with a heavier paid work load. Lucy, a commerce graduate, does the books for her husband's business, largely as an income-splitting strategy which gives her some money of her own. She also volunteers for several school and community organizations. She is, however, a great believer in the importance of routine, and much of her time is spent meeting her children's busy schedules. She drives her elder child to and from kindergarten every morning, and both children to an array of music, swimming, skating and other programs almost every afternoon. Because one child is a preschooler, she must participate in several of these classes herself. Though based at home, she comments that she can "barely get out and do the grocery shopping".

Christine's approach is different. With three children, two of whom are preschoolers, she appreciates the more relaxed pace of life which is possible for -- though *not* always appreciated by -- mothers who are home-based.

> People kind of may think this is dumb but I always think . . . when I go for a walk with my son . . . and we can walk down the street and he can jump in the puddles and crack the ice and I don't have to say, you know, come on, hurry up, I've got to go here, go there or whatever. I enjoy that so much. We do a lot of walking, play a lot together, I really like that. I've got some books, and we do some learning, I guess teaching them numbers and letters and things like that, and the second one's starting in on that now. . . It's not that I do a lot, I sometimes [feel guilty] because my kids aren't in gymnastics, or, you know, art, and they're not in this and they're not in that, so it's not that I take them to a lot of things but I think just being around for them. And we do a lot of things together, even watching movies together, I'll sit and watch a cartoon with them all afternoon and talk about it.

Given this philosophy, it is interesting to see how well her paid work blends in: watching a movie with the children, she will knit; distributing order books for her other job, she will walk with a child "helper."

Dorothy, as noted above, chose to be home-based because of the serious needs of her expanded family. Apart from the occasional sale of her crafts, she is without an income. Asked to describe the general pattern of her days, with four children ranging from a teenager to a two-year-old, she says:

> Clean the house, think about the meals, you know, do stuff with [the two-year-old] whether it's going to be colouring or reading his books or . . . taking him out to play. . . The kids come home and . . . almost every day I play cards with them because they love cards and we learn new card games so I play cards probably every single day of the week, seven days. And I do their school things with them if I can . . . So I'll go in

> their swimming things. I coach basketball for my 10-year-old and I coach baseball for my [seven-year-old], and I don't know, I sew, and that's for my own, trying to feel like I'm productive . . . I really need that . . . Like I renovate. This whole house was way different when we bought it.

Beyond that, though, is more intangible family work which is not confined to particular hours or places.

> I am strong for everybody. I am strong for my husband and his emotional needs and where he's at with his job and what he does . . . I'm strong for my children, supporting them in what they want to do and guiding them at the same time and not pigeon-holing them and . . . all of that is where my job is. That's where I fit in, that's what's important for me. . . I'm not so good on, you know -- making them great lunches. . . I could see that's what a mother should do, but forget it. But what my real job is is really keeping a grip on where they are emotionally and, sort of trying to help them along.

Social support

The question begged by this description of Dorothy's family work is, who cares for the caregiver? The emotional toll of meeting the needs of others, the isolation in which much family work is done, and the extra time spent by home-based women on family work, together generate an urgent need for social support. Some of the women in the group felt they had it in abundance, and others seemed to have to struggle for it. Potential sources of support are husbands (who merit a section to themselves, to follow), relatives (notably mothers, mothers-in-law and sisters), long-time friends, and congenial neighbours. Christine had them all; of all the women in this group, she alone had active, interested parents and parents-in-law no further than ten minutes away, grown-up nieces and nephews able to babysit, a network of church acquaintances and other friends. She comments: "I'm not stuck at home." In contrast, Dorothy, who is "strong for everybody," at first says there is "nobody" to help her along. Then she reconsiders:

> Other women. I never used to be a woman-to-woman type person, in fact, much more the opposite. But other women and just friends that I have, we talk on the phone and that's it.

Jessica's sister had a baby four months before Jessica had her first. They would talk on the phone every morning at 9 a.m. Now that her sister is no longer around she phones her parents daily. Shelley's parents live a 90-minute drive away, but she has friends who provide emotional support, and neighbours with children similar in age to hers. The children move between houses to play, with the rule that visitors get sent home if there is any fighting. "But there really isn't any," Shelley comments. "They're all really good kids. And the moms, I think we have the same kind of rules."

Penny has support from her mother for child care, but she is feeling a need to seek out other young mothers like herself who share her parenting ideas:

> There was a time when you could walk out and sit on your front steps and you knew everyone on your block and you had children and everyone else did, and you did your networking that way. And so, you instantly had a social life . . . And now, it's really a struggle to *find* groups. You know, they have these official names, of support groups, parent and tot's play time, and, you know, two-dollar drop in . . . it's really artificial. And they're very difficult to find because there aren't as many women that have chosen to stay home full-time with their children. So you have to ferret each other out

> at these swim sessions or at the library sessions. . . And hanging out in the playground. . . It's very interesting that that's where I've met most of my current -- well, they're not quite friends yet, but sort of people that share a certain complicity with me, that know where I'm coming from.

Some of Penny's old friends are also raising or planning children now, but most have moved away. She points out the irony of "relying a lot more on strangers now than my friends" for "the pats on the back about child-rearing, specific questions about child-rearing and what children do." Penny lives in an old, well-established neighbourhood not far from the city core. Lucy, in a new subdivision in a different city, has no trouble at all finding like-minded women living nearby. "We have a *wonderful* neighbourhood, I should *tell* you about our neighbourhood!" she exclaims, and then enumerates its advantages: 25 "stay-at-home moms" and 55 stay-at-home children, five play groups operating during the week, carpooling, and social events for mothers alone or for couples.

Annette experiences something similar in the town where she lives -- a resource community with a relatively transient population comprising mainly male breadwinners, female homemakers and young children. Where many other women are in Annette's situation, unable to work because of their husbands' need to be mobile, there are more of them around to welcome newcomers.

> Everybody is so friendly. We were here for, I don't know, two, three months and I had more friends and neighbours that I knew here than the whole year we spent

in [the city]. . .

Angela, living on a farm near a small town, is part of a group of about ten young mothers, all of whom were on maternity leave together. They used to meet weekly when their babies were very small. Now the meetings are about every month as members have returned to work. The day Angela was interviewed there were still balloons in her house left over from a baby shower for one of the women. Later in the month the group was planning an evening "moms' night out," leaving the husbands to care for the children. "I have a lot of support groups," she comments.

Not everyone *wants* such a high level of social contact. Siobhan reports being "annoyed" by the people -- acquaintances at home with *their* children -- who wanted her to spend time with them when she was on maternity leave with her baby. She found she was spending so much time "socializing" that she was not doing any of the things she had planned for her leave.

> I've never had the problem that I've heard so many people say about the transition from such a social atmosphere as an office to being at home by yourself with a baby. I've been at home by myself a lot and I don't mind it. I've never minded it and I can find a million things to do. And I'm quite happy doing [them]. I don't need to be in constant contact with somebody else.

However, she notes she has "quite high phone bills" because of her long-distance calls to her sisters. Her husbands' parents, who look after the baby one day every week to allow her some time to herself, are other valuable sources of support. She also has one particular friend, a planner like herself now also caring for one child. "We do quite a lot together . . . but that's the only person that I do a lot with."

Sue, the former teacher, lives on an acreage on the outskirts of a small town -- the same town that offers Annette such rich resources of friendship for herself and her children. However, Sue is not plugged into the resource community worker network as Annette is. For one thing, she lives too far out of town. For another thing, married to a teacher, she moves in different circles. Various members of her husband's family live or are moving near. Her father-in-law, who owns land in the district, is a frequent visitor who takes the children out to give her "a little break now and then." She also takes the children to visit her parents, who live 45 minutes' drive away. They go about every other week, and stay for a few days. These family resources seem to provide most of Sue's social life. Where once she knew everyone at her husband's school by name, now "a lot of people" are asking her why they see her so seldom. The only neighbours are an older man and an older working couple. There are no young children around. She visits friends with children in town "once in a while." Asked if the lack of social contact was a concern, she comments:

> In a way I think more for the kids than for me. I mean I enjoy other people's company too but I think for them to associate with other kids a little more would probably be good for them.

Asked about her activities and pursuits, she mentions sewing as one of her "favourite pastimes." But the children are a constant presence:

> There are times, you know, you have a bad day now and then or you just need a break from them and some quiet time or something but once in a while just to have even a few hours away from them would be nice.

In fact, when asked at the end of the interview what she would wish for, to change anything in her life, she says, "Just for me to have a break once in a while, to be able to go out for a few hours or on Saturday or something and [they can] stay home with dad."

Husbands, support and family work

Sue is not alone in feeling the need for more support from her husband. Yet the women in this group sometimes find themselves in an invidious position in asking for it. Most of them assume that, since they are home-based, the housework is primarily their responsibility. In this sense they subscribe to the notion that family work exists in a separate sphere which is their domain. But support with child care is much more of a concern. Child care requires both physical work and psychic and emotional involvement; most of the women wanted some physical relief, but several also noted a need to share the emotional burden. Involved in this somehow is the need for prior recognition that it *is* a burden -- in other words, that family work truly is work, that it is work which has value, and that they should be valued for doing it.

If opposite poles had to be identified on a scale of husband involvement in family work, they would probably be represented in this group by Christine and Lucy. Christine, cited at the beginning of this chapter, has a husband who is "very, very involved" with his children, and would be willing to switch roles with Christine to stay home and care for them. Lucy, on the other hand, has told her husband she feels like a single parent. Her decision not to return to full-time paid work was based partly on the fact that her husband's busy career means that he is not around.

> He's busier now than he's ever been. Right now I would not go back to work if you paid me, I really wouldn't. He doesn't get home till nine or 10 o'clock every night of the week. He's very busy right now, and I said to him, I'm *so* happy I'm not working right now, because I just -- it's one thing being at home and doing things on your own time. But if I had to come home every single night of the week and do everything, I mean, you have so many fewer hours in the day to do your laundry and your housework, and feed the kids and put them to bed, and just . . . it would drive me round the bend . . . He comes home so seldom, and even on the weekends he works at least half a day . . . I mean, I guess I'm not a single parent in the sense that I've got an income from an outside source. But it's exhausting.

Lucy describes her husband as a "quality time man." So, she says, when he knows he's going to be home on Saturday afternoon he'll "make an appointment" with the children to go swimming or tobogganning or skating. He won't "sit on the couch and watch football and pretend he's talking to them". But this quality time is achieved by dint of "lots of lectures from me."

An important question here, given Lucy's perception of herself as a single parent, is whether her husband supports the style of mothering she has chosen. Lucy's decision to leave her full-time job, as noted earlier, was also a consequence of her health problem and her babysitter crisis. "I'm my own person," she says. "I told [her husband] why I was doing it and he accepted that." But she points out that he has been very much affected by his own mother's experience of a divorce in middle age, which left her totally unprepared to enter the work force.

> I knew it was my husband's goal for me to have a professional life. And I don't think he could believe it when I made the decision not to go back. But he knew that this babysitting thing was very nerve-wracking for me and he also knew that I was very tired, so he didn't push it. But, I think that I've felt that he would have been prouder of me if I had kept on working, if I had done it all.

Annette's children are younger than Lucy's, and she too suffers from an absentee husband. His job requires a lot of travel, so for a week at a time, or "quite often" over weekends she is alone at home with a three-year-old and an eight-month-old. "Some days I'm crawling the walls," she says. But she lives in a community where her husband's work is well understood and where she has a great deal of other support. When he is home, care of the children can be more of a joint venture.

> Sometimes I can't wait for [her husband] to get home because I just don't want to hold them any more. I don't want to have to worry about them any more. It's nice to be able to share it. . . He'll take them and say, 'Go to the gym and I'll look after them'. . . Even to go for groceries by myself is a treat sometimes, you know.

How well the need for husband support is met depends on how great the need is perceived to be. Annette would like her husband to be more available, but when he is, her situation looks much more like Christine's than like Lucy's. Penny, Jessica and Angela seem to be at that end of the scale also. Jessica jokes about her husband's reluctance to do housework -- even the normal tidying up and dish-washing that accompany the care and feeding of children. But, asked if a role reversal would ever be possible, she cites that as her only (not very serious) concern. Jessica, like Christine, said her husband would "love not to go to work." As for caring for the children, "the kids' clothes might not always match," but he would be good at it. Like Christine she speaks highly of his involvement with the children, and her sense that the decisions about their care and upbringing are shared.

> He does everything for the kids. He changes the dirty diapers, he does baths, he takes the kids out and plays with them, he rolls around on the floor and plays with them, he reads them stories. You know, for the two of us the kids are our priority. And it always has been and probably always will be. . . We are a pretty good team, I think.

Both Penny and Angela are mainly responsible for family work, and neither woman envisages changing places with her husband. In Penny's case, this may be because she feels valued for her family work expertise and is happy to be doing it.

> When you're staying at home, the bulk of the responsibility for home life falls on the person who is at home, it's just more convenient. And then there is

> the question of who is more efficient at what. So, he can do everything but will . . . let me do things because I'm just that much quicker at them . . . I just can't bear watching someone sort of putter around, sort of two hours making a sandwich. . . He's very aware, very conscious of how difficult it is to stay home. And he doesn't feel that he would be able to do it as long and as well as I'm doing it. So -- he's quite happy if I will continue doing it. And I'm rather selfish that way too, because having taught children that were still kids, four years ago, now seeing them on the street at, you know, 15, 16 . . . I realize how precious this time is. So I don't resent the fact that I'm the one staying home.

Staying home also makes her the one who spends most time with each child, and that too has implications. "I think the person that spends the most time with the child knows the child the best. . . And my husband more and more so, as he realizes that it's not how he spends the time, but just plain time, that really allows him to bond with the children."

Penny, as noted earlier, does short-term contract work related to teacher education. During busy work times, her husband is able, and willing, to pick up the slack and do most of the child care. In general, she describes a willingness by both partners to respect the other's needs.

> I rely a lot on my husband, and we *both* need time for our own little things. . . We . . . really appreciate it when [one] person would take care of kids and life in general so the other person could leave and get to their own projects. My husband really likes working with wood in the garage, and you can't do that with a two-year-old. I like reading and writing and I can't do it when someone is pulling at my pen or hitting my mouse and wrecking everything on the computer, so I really rely on my husband.

The traditional division of labour in Angela's household gives her, as has already been noted, everything she wants.

Her husband's highly paid professional work enables her to be home-based. While that means she is responsible for almost all the child care as well as the household work, it also means she has a farm of her own. This is something she says she has always wanted; she tells her husband she is "blissfully happy." The fact that her husband seems to be turning into a caring father is more of an unanticipated bonus than a natural expectation. Asked whether she felt *before* her baby was born that her husband would be involved, she comments:

> I didn't think it would go very well because . . . he [didn't] seem to like little kids at all. So I was happy that he just held [the baby]. And he's ended up being an excellent father. He doesn't help much but I don't expect him to because he's so busy and . . . he's pulling more than his weight financially of course because I'm not putting anything into the farm . . . So I just really don't expect him to come home and change diapers and clean and, you know, because that should be my responsibility as far as I'm concerned. . . But he's excellent just playing with her and loving her, you know. A lot better than I thought he would be.

Dorothy and Siobhan have very different households, but both experience some tension over their expectations for their husband's involvement in child care. Dorothy, who is deeply committed to raising the three children from her husband's first marriage as well as their own two-year-old, gets considerable help with housework. She says that he "does all the laundry," and when he's home "he'll do dishes, he'll wash floors, he'll vacuum." But taking responsibility for the children is another matter. He is, she says "horrible with kids." She maintains that the only conversations he has with them, and the only activities he shares with them, are those she sets up.

> I have to initiate it all and support it all because he's not good, not that that's the way it should be, and we discuss it all the time. And he's trying to change who he is, but that's what it is, changing who he is. His dad was not a dad to him, and he's not a dad to his kids . . . I *make* him, to a point, take some responsibility, but, no, it wouldn't be something that he would do if he had a choice.

Siobhan, who earlier commented that she could find "a million things" to do at home, is struggling, with an eight-month-old baby, to find time to do any of them. She is philosophical about the need to take care of the housework, since she is at home during the day. But some evening relief from child care would give her some much-appreciated time to spend on her own pursuits. Like Penny, she needs someone to take care of "kids and life in general."

> I'd like him to at least feed and bathe [the baby] two or three evenings a week. On weekends, sometimes, I mean, he'll take a turn doing some things, but . . . I've been told that you can't expect them to just *do* these things, you have to sort of lay down the law, and I'm trying to do that now, because I need the break from always being the [baby's caregiver]. And I also think, [her husband] often says to me, look, she wants you, she wants you. And I say, well, the reason she wants me is because she's not *used* to you. If you would do more with her it would be a different story. I mean, if I leave him even to feed her dinner he's in and out of . . . wherever I am, saying, well is this enough? And do I do this? And what do I do? And it's -- sort it out yourself!

In Siobhan's conversation there are hints of another struggle. She speaks of having to "work on her husband" to get him to agree it was time to have a baby, and also noted the fact that he is unhappy in his own job and would like to make a career change. As the major earner in the family, he now feels that would be hard to do. "That was why . . . I had always maintained I would go back to work so that [he] wouldn't have that pressure, added financial pressure," Siobhan says. "But . . . people change." The reality is that not all husbands share their wives' commitment to full-time home-based care of children. Siobhan's husband, like Lucy's, might actually have been more supportive of a wife in full-time employment.

This was probably the case for Shelley as well. Knowing that her income was needed to make the monthly home mortgage payment, but committed to being at home with her children, Shelley babysat full-time as a day home operator. Part of her deal with her husband was that he wouldn't have to do any housework.

> My mom did everything, and she stayed home. And I thought, well . . . I can. But then I realized that she had five kids, but they weren't all preschoolers at the same time. And I babysat [on average] five kids, and they were all like four, three, couple of babies. . .

Her mother also wasn't being paid for her child care services. In fact, Shelley calculated that if her husband paid her the going rate for caring for their two children, she would be making more money than he was. It failed to persuade him to help with housework, even though she was in effect in full-time paid employment.

> I did ask him, will you pick one thing? But he wouldn't do dishes because they were half belonging to the day home. He wouldn't clean the bathroom because the day home messed it up. . . . I said, well, do the laundry

> then, because I don't clean any of their stuff. [His response was] 'I don't know how' or 'I don't like doing the laundry' or something. Well, by the time we finished our argument about it, I had quit babysitting. . . like this argument went on for three years.

Yet when she had worked full-time as a teacher, before the children were born, "it was 50-50." During the time she taught full-time after their first child was born, he did most of the housework while she (at her specific request) did most of the child care. Somehow, Shelley's being "at home" produced a different, less supportive, response -- even though what she was doing at home was paid work.

Melanie and to a lesser extent Jessica would identify with Shelley's problem. Both are attempting to establish businesses from home; both were interviewed when the businesses were fledgling and not yet making a profit; both know their husbands do not see this business work as "work." As Jessica comments:

> What would be really nice is if I could make this into a permanent part-time job, that my husband would realize that it is a job, even though I'm not leaving the house. Because right now he hasn't quite realized that me staying up until one or two o'clock in the morning doing these [crafts down] in the basement or whatever, I don't think he's quite realized how much time it takes, how much effort and thought. . . He promised me that if I did work [at the department store -- outside the home] he would pull up the slack. But I'm not working outside of the house. So I don't think he's quite made the connection yet. However, once I start bringing in a profit, then he'll realize, I think that's what it will take for him to realize.

Melanie's husband works evening shifts. He is home to care for their child when she goes out to teach her noon-hour classes, and she considers him to be in many ways "a good dad." What he does only reluctantly is take responsibility for their daughter while they are both at home and she is trying to do her work.

> Sometimes my husband is supportive and sometimes not. I think it would be different if I was leaving the home and going to a workplace, where I had my time to do my job. I could come home and be a mom and a wife and whatever else. But it's not. I wake up and I have phone calls . . . If I'm in my housecoat, and I have a phone call from a principal, my husband won't realize that he should get [their child] hanging off my leg, so that I can have an adult and professional conversation. . . I work all the time. On the weekends. And my husband complains . . . I have a feeling that he feels it inconveniences *him* if I have to work, that maybe he might have to watch our little girl more than he would like to, if he's got something else planned. And, so I just say, well, help me out around the house more so that I can maybe *not* work on the weekend. It's still a traditional world.

Employment in the future

Whatever their present circumstances, all of the women envisaged spending more time in paid employment some time in the future. Shelley in fact was looking for a teaching job at the time of the interview, and would have accepted full-time work if that was all she could get. Lucy, who had formerly worked as a sales representative, was also consciously planning her return to work.

> That's constantly on my mind, in the volunteer work that I choose and all of that kind of stuff. Right now I sell advertising for our community newsletter, and I [think], gee, I wonder if the advertising business has flexible hours . . . When I'm looking at the volunteer work that I'm doing I'm wondering if I will benefit from it in the future.

Like most of the women, Lucy sees herself starting back in regular paid work when both her children are in school. But if an interesting part-time job came along even now, she would consider it. In fact, she has her eye on the company which employs a friend part-time as a sales representative.

Of all the women in this group, Sue has effected the most complete withdrawal from paid employment. She anticipates her return to teaching with some trepidation; some problems with disciplining junior high school students in her last full-time job have made her very selective in the jobs she will consider. Yet during her years away from teaching, she has had several job offers, both full- and part-time. It seems unlikely, when she is finally willing to return, that she will not be able to do so. When a suitable vacancy occurs, Shelley too will presumably return to a classroom -- and a job -- very like the one she left.

Shelley, Sue and Lucy -- two teachers and a sales representative -- are the only women in this group who seem likely to return to the same kinds of jobs they held before they had children. For the others, the years of bearing and raising children are likely to be a watershed.

Two of them are already launched, in a small way, on their new working lives. Angela's occasional substitute teaching is already secondary to the work she does on the farm. Her husband also plans to move his agricultural business there, and add a small outlet selling livestock equipment. Angela will help in her husband's business when it's busy, and take charge of the other outlet. Melanie has taken two partners into her business. She hopes that when her children are in school she will be involved with the "ideas part" of the business, not its daily running, and will be doing her art work full-time.

The other women are all exploring different ideas, and at this stage seem open to all sorts of possibilities. When asked to speculate on future employment, Annette, the former engineer, talked of returning to engineering after doing some upgrading which she was sure she would need. But she also spoke of the possibility of returning to university to do a law degree, or maybe even starting a business. Siobhan, the former planner, does not see herself ever returning to a nine-to-five job unless it was "absolutely necessary for our financial stability". Neither did she see much planning work in her future. More attractive alternatives include working in art for children, or possibly going into some kind of business with her husband.

But most of the women specified that any future work would also be contingent on the needs of children. Indeed Christine, though intending to return to work, does not want to do so until her youngest child is in Grade 6 or 7. Given that she is planning one more child, she will then be about 42, and will have been away from regular employment outside the home for about 17 years. Penny, the former teacher, currently working on a contract basis in teacher education, sees multiple job possibilities arising out of her many interests and her professional and family networks. The range goes from recreation instruction with children, through administration and bookkeeping for a family business, to home schooling for her children (and possibly some others). As a professional educator, with a particular teaching philosophy and requirement for instruction in (high-quality) French, she is concerned about where to send her children to school.

> I think the new chapter depends a lot on the decisions I make, my husband and I make for the education of our children. . . If they do end up in a public school, well, that . . . sort of frees up my time. . . I still want to be very involved in their lives and their education, of course, but I know that I will have a possibility of starting something new. What it is I don't know. But if we decide to homeschool or to explore those kinds of alternative education then of course I'll be involved there.

Jessica, the former child care counsellor who is now setting up her crafts business, may continue with it once her children are in school. But she is also considering returning to university to train as a teacher. She comments:

> Ideally, you know, I want my kids to come home from school after making their little things or getting an A on a spelling test or whatever, and say, mommy, mommy, I got an A . . . I want to be here for them. And I want to make sure they get out the door and off to school safe and sound. I want to be here if they're going to come home for lunch. I mean, you know, not a lot of jobs fit into that category.

Dorothy, the former teacher, has much firmer plans, but shares Jessica's commitment to working school hours.

> This is what I'm going to go into. I'm going to go into travel and tourism . . . I would love to be a tour guide

> for older people who, get on a bus and let's just take them on to wherever, you know. . . And I see myself doing that one day . . . But it's a struggle in a way because I think, all right, I'll do that and I'm going to start taking night courses and get the education and by the time [her two-year-old] is in Grade 1 I can go for a full year or two, whatever it takes, and still be home for him before and after school. But after that when I start working full-time, where will it take me? When will I be home, at five o'clock? Will I be home at three, or three-thirty? That bothers me because I think it's important but at the same time there comes a time when it's just -- I don't know how I will handle it.

It is clear from this chapter that all of the women who chose to be home-based mothers were financially able to do so. The availability of this option is class-based. Many of these women professed the strong belief that they themselves could provide the best possible care for their children. But this was not the only reason for detaching from the formal work force. Ill health, moves to accommodate the privileged male job, concerns about alternative childcare, and other family demands, all contributed to the decision to remain at home. And as a group these women were characterized by considerable resourcefulness and creativity in terms of what *else* (besides child care and housework) they did at home. All but one had some sort of paid work, and all planned to return to full-time paid work some time in the future. What chiefly distinguishes most of these women from those described in the earlier chapters, however, is the extent to which their child-rearing years are a watershed between the careers they once had and their plans for the future. In few cases would the careers for which they originally trained survive the transition to motherhood.

These women, like the mothers described in the two previous chapters, have made decisions about paid work and family responsibilities in the light of their beliefs about child care and children's needs, their family's finances -- and often other factors which caused former plans to change. What is evident is that none of the ways of dealing with paid work and family life is easy; all of them involve some kind of trade-off. It is not humanly possible to work full-time in both areas -- and yet that is what most of the women would like to be able to do. Some of the women described in the next chapter, who do not (or do not yet) have children, are in fact very similar to the women in the study who are already mothers, and are looking forward to joining their ranks. Others are confronting the transition to motherhood in terms of the tradeoff, the price to be paid.

CHAPTER 9

CHILDLESS -- OR CHILDFREE

Nearly 60 per cent of university-educated women aged 25-29 are childless, as Chapter 2 noted (Ravanera,1995). It is to be expected, then, that a substantial group of educated women will reach their 30s with the transition to motherhood still ahead of them. This is certainly the case for the women described in this study.

Apart from the presence of children in their families, what distinguishes the childless women in the sample from those described in the previous chapters, who have already made the transition to motherhood? The short answer is, not very much. In fact, statistically, the chances are that most of those who are still childless will in fact have at least one child within the next few years. Probably the more realistic question is to ask why many of these women have not *yet* become mothers. Though educational and occupational choices clearly have some role to play -- the teachers in the Youth Employment Study had children sooner than the other women -- other factors are also at work.

Childlessness, conventionally, is considered to be either voluntary (in other words a conscious choice), or involuntary (in other words the consequence of circumstances beyond a woman's control and contrary to her choice). For well-educated middle-class women in Canadian society, the widespread use of effective contraception means that most are "voluntarily childless" for at least a part of their sexually active lives. And in fact the more recently coined term for this voluntary absence of children is "childfree" (Veevers, 1980). Its advocates claim it avoids the suggestion, implicit in "childless," that being without children is necessarily a lack or shortcoming. But both terms have most meaning when applied to women for whom pregnancy is socially not only acceptable but also expected. It is fair to suggest that for unmarried women, the older they become the greater the social expectation that they will marry. Similarly, for married women, the longer they have been married the greater the social expectation that they will have children, and the more a postponement comes to be seen as a permanent state.

The question of whether childlessness is voluntary or involuntary is often not clear, because the public manifestation is the same in each case. It could be said that only the woman herself, along with those in whom she confides, actually knows whether she is voluntarily or involuntarily childless. And in fact the distinction is a matter of perception and belief. It could be argued that a woman can only be "voluntarily childless" if she believes she is able to conceive. The fact is that she will not know whether she can until she tries -- at which time childlessness which was voluntary may become involuntary. In other words, a woman who uses contraception and thus considers herself voluntarily childless for the first few years of her marriage or long-term relationship may find herself unable to conceive when she is ready to start a family.

The distinction between voluntary and involuntary childlessness is further complicated by the question of marital status. For the sample of women university graduates in the Youth Employment Study, marriage, or at least a stable relationship with long-term prospects, was clearly a prerequisite to having children. When the total group was last surveyed, in 1992, only three women out of 57 were single when they became pregnant. When interviewed later, two were living with their child's father, and one had married and had a second child with her husband. The point here is that, in cases where single status is not preferred or freely chosen, being single could well be considered a "cause" of involuntary childlessness. It might also become an increasing concern for women whose biological clocks are starting to tick. Eight single women, ranging in age from 28 to 33, were interviewed on the basis of these assumptions.

The reasons for remaining childless are likely to be different for married women for whom, presumably, the relationship prerequisite has already been met. For that reason, as noted in Chapter 4, an attempt was made to make contact with as many as possible of the married women in the larger sample who were childless at the time of the 1992 survey. Seven education graduates and eight graduates from the other faculties involved in the survey were interviewed in depth. In addition telephone interviews with a further 19 women (eight education graduates and 11 from other faculties) were interviewed by telephone. Of these 34 women (67 per cent of the 51 who were married and childless in 1992), 14 either had a child or were pregnant with their first child when they were approached in late 1993 or early 1994. Twenty were still childless.

The point also needs to be made here that, just as it takes two people to achieve a pregnancy, so in cases where pregnancy is a conscious choice two people are presumably involved in making it. In fact, the interviews suggested strongly that men leave this particular decision to women. The great majority of women shared a common perception of their spouse's position, and used almost the same words to describe it: whatever she decided would be fine with him. The spouses who *did* take stands of their own on the decision are noted in the discussion to follow.

"Childlessness" deconstructed

The interviews with women without children suggest that decisions about whether, and/or when, to have children take into account a complex mix of personal and social factors which are perhaps more amenable to observation among women who have not yet had children. (As noted in Chapter 5, factors contributing to the decision to have a baby are less clear once the baby has arrived and the reasons for the timing of the pregnancy are retrospective.) It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the individual psychological dimension of reproductive decision-making. But of greater sociological interest, in any case, is the fact that reproductive decision-making does indeed *have* a social component. The decision is made in a social context of family and economic circumstances. It may be powerfully affected by factors outside the individual woman's control, which act independently of her "personal" wishes in ways which may not always be clear to her.

External factors are most equivocal among women who are voluntarily childless, and whose childlessness is therefore seen as a free choice. Sixteen of the childless women interviewed seemed to be voluntarily childless. The interviews indicate that they were at three clearly identifiable stages in what appeared to be an ongoing decision-making *process*. The first stage is a stage of temporary postponement of childbearing until certain personal goals have been fulfilled. The second stage is represented by women who have prolonged their voluntarily childless stage for many years, because, for a variety of reasons, the time was not right for a baby. The third stage, which only three of the women seemed to be approaching, was a commitment to permanent childlessness.

External factors are of course most clear in the case of women who are involuntarily childless. The interviews suggest that there are three such external "causes": infertility, unstable or unhappy marital relationships, or the absence of a relationship. Twelve of the women interviewed were represented here.

Voluntary childlessness

Temporary postponement of childbearing was evident among eight of the women interviewed. For most of these women, the issue was not whether, but when, they would have children. For Laurel, in fact, the postponement was about to end. An education graduate who never taught, Laurel worked in a variety of jobs before entering an administrative position in an educational institution, where she had worked for the previous four years. Her husband had been made a partner in his firm, they had bought a house, and were planning to start a family very soon. Laurel was 30. She said she felt that this was the right time for a baby because "I have done a lot" and "the age is right."

Carolyn, a 30-year-old teacher, had been married for five years. The postponement of children had meant more time and freedom to have fun -- "we have been holidaying instead." She had a personal deadline age of 32, and would like to have two children.

For Judy, too, the postponement had an end more or less in sight. Judy, also a 30-year-old teacher, had been married only about 18 months, but would like children "probably soon". For Judy, however, the right time to have a baby was both hard to pin down and not entirely her choice.

> I guess I don't believe that there is a right time. . . I think people wait and wait and wait. . . I don't think anybody is prepared, you know. . . But I guess the right time for me, probably. . . is when my husband is willing to be -- like, I think it's a lot of work, and I really praise a lot of single parents because I don't know how they do it. I think you have to be 50-50 . . . Not even 50-50, you have to be willing to give and take, because it's so much work . . . I guess that's what I would see the right time is, when you're both willing to give to that child, I guess give to that child everything, you know.

Judy's husband was not at that stage yet. He had also just started a new job, which she described as a big transition. "We've talked about that," she said. "And he's getting there."

For the three other women in this group, however, the constraints of their working lives seemed to be the major cause of the postponement. One of them, a teacher working in a rural community, was fired from her job with the separate school board after she converted to her husband's religious denomination on marriage. The couple moved to the city, where for nearly five years she was unable to find a permanent teaching job. She made do instead with substitute teaching, and a variety of short-term contracts. When interviewed, just before the start of the 1994-95 school year, her prospects were looking brighter, as she was being interviewed for a full-time music teaching position (her specialty). There was no question about having children -- both she and her husband wanted them. But she wanted a full-time teaching position first. That would enable them to buy a house and become financially "a little more stable." It would also allow the possibility of a permanent contract with a school board. "Once I get tenure, I'll take a year off (maternity leave) and then maybe come back full-time," she said.

Dana had worked since graduation as a social worker. In 1992, suffering from stress and wanting a change, she accepted a severance package and took a few months off. When interviewed she was working as an educator for a non-profit agency. "It's OK," she commented. "I have to admit that the pay is really bad but it's the only thing that came up." Though her husband was keen to have children, she had not felt ready until recently. Now, at nearly 30, she was worrying that "we shouldn't have waited as long as we did." But she explained the postponement in these terms:

> I don't think I wanted to have kids. I didn't think I could handle it. . . I had been unsettled at work for quite a while. I knew I wanted to leave.

The exhaustion she experienced in her social services job was another factor which seemed to work against having children. However, Dana and her husband were about to move to another province and buy into a business. Once they were settled, they planned to start a family right away.

Anna, a 30-year-old engineering graduate now working as a computer programmer, also wanted to defer a pregnancy for two more years. She too had been married only 18 months. But the more significant reason for the postponement was to give her more work experience. Anna graduated as a petroleum engineer at a time when the labour market for her skills was extremely tight. So she requalified as a geophysicist, and worked for four years for a small company which then was forced to lay her off during the recession 18 months previously. Having taken some evening courses, she was able to complete a technical college diploma in computer programming in eight months, and then got a job with a consulting company. She was now programming in the fields of petroleum engineering and geophysics, and noted that the companies that laid her off would "gladly hire me back!" For Anna, a baby in two years would be good timing. As well as allowing more income to go towards paying off the house, it would give Anna a chance to establish herself in her new field.

> I need work experience. And then also I'll be 32, 33, you don't want to wait too much longer either, right? For me it's age-wise and work experience.

But even where the marriage, and the postponement of children, had both been relatively short, for some women there was the possibility that the postponement would be extended for some time. This was the case for Louise and Monica, for both of whom the troubled state of the economy was likely to make them wait to have children. Louise, a 28-year-old arts graduate, had been married for two years. She worked at secretarial jobs after graduation before returning to technical school to qualify as a public health inspector. She had worked in her present job for five years, and was highly satisfied with it. However, rumours of privatization of health units such as the one for which she worked made her job seem less secure. And into the bargain, her husband had just been laid off from his job. Having children was simply not an issue for Louise at the time of the interview. She commented: "We have bills to pay."

Economic insecurity was also a factor for Monica, a 32-year-old science graduate, married for three years, who had worked in her husband's business as well as juggling part-time work at her pre-university occupation of dental hygienist. Two years earlier, injuries in a car accident prevented her from working full-time at the job. But while she had organized a satisfactory combination of three part-time jobs for herself, incorporating some public health work and some teaching, her husband had had to wind down his business. Now, faced with her own busy schedule of work and outside interests, the consequences of her accident, and her husband's uncertain financial situation, children were a low priority -- and her husband, she noted, was "less keen" than she was.

Prolonged postponement of childbearing characterized five of the women interviewed. Unlike the previous group, for most of whom childlessness was seen as only a temporary state, these women, who had generally been married and childless longer, were also very ambivalent about the prospect of having children. Though taking into account the same issues -- family circumstances and spousal support, life goals, and work -- they had so far not come to any resolution of what all perceived to be a very current dilemma.

"All my friends are having children," commented Leanne, a 30-year business graduate and accountant, who had been married for five years. Her two brothers also had children. Asked if this felt like pressure, she said:

> Oh, it is pressure. You do have people saying, they have children, well, are you going to have a family? Why don't you want kids? It's not whether I want them or not. Maybe we can't have them, I don't know. But there is pressure. . . It is, it's really an issue. And I think, as soon as I hit 30, everyone assumes that we're going to have a family right away. I don't know what it is about 30. I mean, I have had I bet you four different people say to me, oh, so we heard you were pregnant.

Kim, a 30-year-old education graduate and high school teacher also married for five years, felt, like Leanne, that the decision about having children was looming large.

> It's hanging over my head. And I've never felt the urge to have children yet, at all. And the last couple we knew just got pregnant, and so we're kind of the only ones left in a way. . . And my sister-in-law . . . had a baby two weeks ago, so -- and I was her coach, so this is definitely a big issue in our lives. . . I'm very confused about having children. . . I don't know, I don't know what to do about that, and yeah, I don't have the urge, but I think about us as parents and, you know, I think it would be a wonderful, wonderful experience. Teaching a lot of rotten kids has turned me off too. Right now we talk about maybe, like *maybe* having a family or starting a family next fall . . . That's where we're at.

Leslie, a 30-year-old business graduate married for six years and working in a provincial government department, had answered "Maybe" to a question in the 1992 survey about whether she might begin raising a family within the next three years. A year later, when interviewed, she commented:

> I'm still at a maybe. I guess I'm leaning a little more towards the yes. I probably wouldn't even worry about thinking about this right now except for, of course, my age. And I'm still not 100 per cent sure. I'm not sure how I would handle the demands of working all day, to go home to children after work and if . . . there would be enough quality in terms of the time I would spend with them, and what I would actually be providing to those children.

From these general comments, several factors emerge which seem to have some bearing on the decision-making process. The first is pressure from friends and family members. Leanne and Kim experienced as somewhat stressful the fact that friends and family members were having children all around them, so to speak. Not surprisingly, however, a circle of friends made up primarily of people without children can act as support for the childless status quo. Leslie commented that only one among the friends that "I actually do things with" had children.

> And our friends that do have kids, we don't really hang out with them very much any more. And mainly because everything that they did had to be totally family-oriented. There was no 'Let's go out for dinner without the kids.' Everything had to be totally family-oriented.

The second issue was age. Reaching 30, as Leanne noted, seemed to trigger some special concerns. In her case, and presumably those of some of the other women as well, the concerns were largely on others' account, because only Leslie saw 30 as a personal, biological reckoning time, and an age beyond which physical problems of pregnancy and childbirth might occur. Leslie recounted the story of a manager in her office, who had a second child at 35. According to Leslie, there was "a very strong possibility that the baby may have had Down's Syndrome." Another friend, who had a baby at 40 "had the same thing, and was explaining . . . all the kind of emotions that she went through in dealing with that, so, I guess those kinds of things are also factoring in."

The third issue related to employment. For all the women in this group, having a baby would mean some modification to the flow of their present working lives. A large part of their ambivalence about having children seemed to centre on how they could change their work lives to accommodate children, and in fact whether they wanted to do so. For example, Karen, a 31-year-old science graduate married for six years, left her job as a geophysicist after five years to enter medicine. With several more years of study and residency ahead of her, and a husband finishing a Ph.D. and about to launch his own career, having children was certainly not an option. "Now, in the next couple of years, we both feel we are so busy that it wouldn't be fair to any of us." Once both careers were established, there would be "more time and interest", and "probably, ultimately" they would have children. On the other hand, having worked so hard to *get* both careers established, they might want to take some time to relax and enjoy themselves.

Kim, whose teaching career had been punctuated by moves to accommodate her husband's work, said that for the first five years she "hated" the job. High school students, she pointed out, can be "tough to deal with." Added to this, her frequent moves meant she was usually the new teacher. She considered that the students took advantage of her -- and so did the schools, which tended to load on the "shitty classes" and the "problem students." In her sixth year, however, she taught in a large inner city school. She was one of 14 people teaching English as a Second Language, and she was teaching students who were mainly 18 and older.

> It was fantastic. The first time I ever enjoyed going to work. . . At that point I realized, well, not only should I teach ESL, but, I want to teach only adults. And that's what I did for part of last year.

Because the adult ESL position was not a permanent job with benefits, she chose to return to a more secure high school ESL position, in spite of her preference for adults. But she was "surprised" at how well it was going, and how happy she felt. It was not something she would readily give up to accommodate a family. "I've only had my niche for two years, two full years like that . . . And I don't want to just . . . cash it in." Kim dismissed the possibility of combining a family with teaching full-time:

> Oh, my God! The hours. It would be just too exhausting. For me, it's too exhausting. And so much of my energy goes into the school day. And I would want to give my children some of my energy and I don't think I could if I taught full-time. I'd just teach, and then I'd have to run home, and [I'd] want to play with them and spend time with them and cook for them and all this. And I'd have nothing left for myself. And that's important to me. So I'd either work part-time or, maybe I'd work nights or something like that.

Leslie, who commented earlier that she was not sure how she would handle the demands of a family together with the demands of a working day, was exploring work options when she was interviewed. Having worked for seven years (almost her whole working life) in the same branch of a provincial government department, she had just started a two-year secondment to another branch in the same department. In her previous branch, work had become "very stressful." The branch was a high-profile branch, high performance standards were set, overtime was routine and "you were expected to be giving 150 per cent at all times." The new job gave her more contact with people, the chance to work as part of a team, and some insight into what it was like to work in another area.

> I think I consider work to be very important. I believe in coming in and doing a good job . . . but I do have a tendency to probably let it weigh me down some days. When I go away I don't actually leave the job once I've walked out of the building. I think I've become much more dedicated to work in the last few years, and I think you can slip into that very easily once you start to take on more responsibilities. . . And I have questioned, when you talk about your personal life, I find that to be conflicting at times. . . I felt like I was giving up a lot of personal things and just kind of, just taking on work as being, you know, the number one thing. And that becomes too hard on you in terms of your home life . . . So I thought, OK, I'd better take a step back and [see] what's important, what kind of balance to find.

In neither her former branch nor the area where she was currently working did Leslie have models of professional women successfully combining work and family responsibilities. In fact, in her former job, there were examples of mothers at her professional level or above either leaving the branch or considering doing so because of the workload. In the job to which she was seconded, she was, at age 30, "in the youngest age group," and none of the women working with her had children.

Leslie did not explicitly relate her job concerns to the likelihood of starting a family. But there seemed little doubt that the two were related, given her assertion that, if she did have a child, she would like it to be by the time she was 32, and that her preference if she had a child would be to work part-time. She took the secondment "hoping to see if it would be a little more fulfilling." But she had also in the past weighed up the possibility of a "super-flexible job" -- perhaps in the sports field, possibly as a lifeguard or "an instructor of some sort." But "in the last little while I haven't, really, allowed myself to do that" -- maybe because "I'm afraid to explore those things." Another option might be to start her own business, or become involved in her husband's business. Her husband was "more than willing" to entertain the latter possibility.

> I have been looking at options to get out of where I was. And so that was one of them. But I was, *I* was afraid to make that leap, from a secure income into the uncertainty.

If there was a sense in which both Kim and Leslie needed to take care of work issues in order seriously to consider having children, Leanne seemed willing to consider a baby as an *opportunity* to move to a different kind of work and a less frenzied lifestyle. Having worked continuously since graduation, for two companies, and having been promoted steadily, she was at the level she would have expected. Now, "I like it, but I'm not sure I'm cut out to be a behind-the-desk accountant." Asked if having a baby might be a welcome break, she answered:

> It's funny, I thought of that. We had a meeting this morning, and I thought of that. I thought, I was just really tired, I didn't want to be at this meeting, and I thought as I was sitting there, I could decide to have a baby and that would get me out! [But] that's not the right reason!

Leanne considered that her company would provide a supportive working environment if she did have a baby and decided to keep working full time -- even though a co-worker who was then pregnant was the first pregnancy in the company since Leanne started there. What that said, according to Leanne, was that "we have a lot of males, or females who have already had their children." She also believed companies in general, and her company in particular, were "becoming more flexible in that they're allowing you to work part-time, they're allowing you to work from your home if you have a computer." Her dilemma was rather in deciding what she really wanted to do.

> Actually I've thought, would I work or would I stay home? . . . I've spent a lot of time going to school. I've worked my way up. Like, do I want to give all that up ? [Because] if you come back to the work force in five years you're not going to work where you left off. Then the other part of me thinks, well, you have to make that choice, it's one or the other, and I don't know which way I really [swing]. And financially, I mean, we could

> financially live on one salary, but then . . . I find with two-income families, the kids have everything they want. Then there's the ones who don't. And do you want your kids to be in the category that don't? I don't know. It's tough. And maybe I think too much about that.

But when she considered the alternative of *not* working full-time, Leanne was beginning to envisage a different kind of working life. A sports and fitness enthusiast, she was thinking about the possibility of working as an aerobics instructor. She also sewed, for pleasure -- and in a very small way for profit, making costumes for a friend who had a business doing clowning. Teaching beginner accounting classes was another prospect.

> I think I would do something on the side from my home if it came to that. Like, we're going to get a computer, and I can do a small company's books at home. If I decided to teach aerobics I could teach aerobics. If I decided to pursue a company with my sewing, I could do that . . .I took a sewing course because I thought, *if* I decide to stay home I can fall back on [it]. *If* I decide to stay home I can do accounting. I'd like to keep all my options open!

Leanne's husband would "really like" to have children, but had told her that if she did not want them, "that's fine with him too." He had also commented on the potentially positive change a baby might make to their lifestyle.

> Our lives are so haphazard. Like we'll go through a week where we're both so busy maybe we don't even really see each other and he said, you know, I think if we did have a baby, it would give us a reason to come home, a reason not to be out, you know. Like we'd still play sports, but maybe not three or four different ones, you would pick two and that would be it.

But all the women were aware that lifestyle changes necessitated by the arrival of a baby would mean some loss of personal freedom and autonomy. In some cases, this was also linked to personal identity, and the question of whether this too would change -- or at least be threatened -- in the transition to motherhood. This concern was the fourth major issue raised by the interviews. Margaret, a 32-year-old business graduate who had worked from graduation as a graphic designer, was grappling after seven years of marriage with whether to have a baby. She had some unique problems to deal with: a spouse who had "decided against" having children, and her concern about raising a mixed-race child. But even setting these challenges aside, she had to evaluate other potential changes in a life filled with many time-consuming interests. She commented that even without a baby, "I hardly have enough time." For Margaret, the choice was "to be a mother, or to be yourself" -- or to try for some balance between the two.

Kim shared a similar concern. She spoke of "a lot of interesting things, profound things" that had happened to her in the previous two years, and commented, "I didn't really know who I was until about . . . two years ago."

> I'm going through a major kind of identity journey myself right now. And until I work on myself emotionally and psychologically and until I get to a point where I feel good about where I'm at -- then I would think about having children.

Some of the changes in Kim's life had involved an awakening of feminist consciousness, and an involvement with a circle of women, all of whom had children, who formed "a spiritually oriented support group."

> They all tell me, do what you want, but don't have them now! Don't have them now! Wait! Wait! Wait! . . . They all say they should have waited, they just did not develop themselves or nurture themselves to the extent they wanted to. They did not follow their own interests. Selfishly or not, but they didn't do that.

Leslie described her concerns in terms of day-to-day realities:

> I don't think . . . that I'd have the freedom that I do now. OK, I'm off work, I think I'll grab my bike, I'll meet all my friends, we'll go for a two-hour ride and then we'll go out and get something to eat, you know. And so I'm not sure, what kind of freedom would I have for me, once I have kids? And I think the older you get and the more time you have, you probably get used to having all that freedom . . . But I also see, when I see . . the few friends that I have that are staying home, it's *very* traditional. The woman's home all the time, and their husbands seem to be working, participating in life, doing different activities . . . I don't really consider myself to be super-traditional in the female role per se. And so, I'm sure that's part of the reason why I'm having difficulty coming to terms with all these things . . . As an example, one or two of these women that are staying home, where I said their husbands participate in life, I really believe that. I don't see these women getting the same freedom to participate in things, I don't see them getting the material things, the toys, so to speak. . . I'd have to have my own things. I guess I'm just worried about losing my independence. And having something that *I* do that's . . . not part of what my husband does, or part of someone else, but it's for me.

Leslie, a keen skier as well as an avid cyclist, had set some personal goals for herself for the year -- for example, some skiing, getting in some races, and one big trip. "And I guess I'm worried that, I want to do these things, just in case . . . if I do have children." In the same vein, Leanne wanted to work overseas for a year or so. Kim wanted to work in a Third World country, helping people in some capacity, probably teaching. Choosing *not* to go away would mean "not being able to do what I think I want to do, if I have children."

> So, well, I'll have to do it before I have children. Well, am I going to do it? If I don't do it am I going to regret it? So I think about doing that.

For all these women, a decision to have a baby would involve changes in their working lives and their personal and family relationships. Perhaps more surprisingly, however, a decision *against* having children seemed likely to herald some changes also. The point seemed to be that a career originally intended to be a central life interest only until the advent of children might have less durability and appeal over a longer term. Thus for example both Leanne and Leslie seemed likely to make changes in their working lives in any case. "I can't see myself being here at age 40," said Leslie of the job from which she had sought a secondment. Of the way she envisaged her working life without children, Leanne said:

> If I stay with the same company I can see myself being very busy. I guess a lot more energy would be put into work, because there'd be -- not that there's nothing else but you don't have the energy to be placed on children or at home. So I would probably pursue my career, maybe even change careers. . . I might change. I may take more courses and . . . change my career path. Which probably would inevitably happen.

Possible new paths included work in the general field of rehabilitation medicine, or, following her sporting interests, perhaps a job as a personal trainer or aerobics instructor. But Leanne was also rethinking possible future family relationships in the absence of her own children. Like Kim (who had just been present at the birth of her nephew), she thought that her connection to her siblings' children would become even stronger. "I would be a very good aunt," she said.

On the cusp of the decision about whether or not to have children, Kim wondered whether she would choose in favour of children, and then live to regret her other options. Leanne and Leslie, on the other hand, worried that they might choose other options, and much later come to regret not having children. Asked what might take the place of children, Leanne said:

> That's the one thing that I always think about. I think, OK, when I'm 50, 60 years old, and if we haven't had children, is our relationship strong enough that it would always just be [her husband] and I and that would be enough? I do question that.

"You only get one kick at the cat," commented Leslie. She questioned whether 10 more years of working at a job that was often less than fulfilling would be compensation enough for a family, and whether activities that were intensely attractive now would hold their appeal.

> I enjoy my life the way it is right now. It's just that I think, well, I have to make a decision before I get too old. . . . Who's to say that at age 40, you're going to want to go out there and ride your bike at night, you know? I may tire of that in two years. And we may move on to different things that we enjoy.

Examples of permanent childlessness, voluntarily chosen, were more difficult to find among the childless women interviewed. Given that pregnancy can be achieved, albeit with increasing difficulty and risk, until a woman reaches menopause, a decision at 30 or 31 to remain permanently childless can be revoked (unless of course either partner in the case decides to be sterilized.) The growing number of well-educated middle class women who are having their first babies in their mid- to late 30s attests to the fact that biological -- and psychological -- deadlines are being extended. None of the voluntarily childless women interviewed had permanently closed the door on motherhood. Some of them clearly intended to have children in the future, but all of them were in any case simply too young to make a permanent decision *not* to have children. Given that minds can change, however, three of the women interviewed seemed to be leaning more towards permanent childlessness than the others described already.

Lana, a 31-year-old systems analyst who had been married for eight years at the time of the interview, spoke of being in a stable relationship and "very happily married." A business graduate who had later studied for a diploma in computer systems technology, Lana had some false starts to her career before finally settling into her present job in a provincial government department. Now, she spoke of plans to move to part-time work "when we can afford it." A long-term goal had been to own her own business, perhaps a pharmacy with her pharmacist husband. The couple also owned and were training two dogs, who were an absorbing interest. Other business possibilities included a dog kennel. Lana also felt a strong commitment to her widowed mother, with whom she spent a lot of time. Both Lana and her husband were agreed on "our childless stance right now." Lana said her personal deadline for having children was 35, but that she might stay childless.

Lana's estimation of her marriage addresses the question raised earlier by Leanne, who wondered whether her own marriage would be sufficiently strong and satisfying to compensate for the absence of children. A corresponding question, raised by women like Lana who feel their marriage relationships are particularly happy, is, why risk a change which might be a change for the worse? For example, Nancy, a 31-year-old urban planner married for five years, commented that she knew she had a "really good marriage" and that she was "thankful every day for that."

> We're happy all the time. I mean, there's stuff that [gets] in the way like family things that . . . you wish you could make things right. But we definitely see that we're on the same wavelength. . . It's pretty good right now and I know the clock is ticking and I think the longer I wait the more the decision will be made for me.

Nancy described having gone through a period of feeling envious of the fuss made of a pregnant sister-in-law, and thinking that she should have children to fulfil the expectations of the prospective grandparents. But there were also pressures in the opposite direction: an unwillingness to stay at home with children (combined with a belief that this would be best for them); a wish for more freedom and autonomy in her own working life (perhaps to work part-time or start a business with her husband) but not at the expense of her freedom and autonomy at home; and finally, an awareness of the demands -- and the fulfilment -- that accompanied her existing family roles. Like Leanne, cited earlier, Nancy said, "But definitely . . . I'll do my best to be a good aunt." She also saw herself as being supportive of her sister-in-law's mothering.

> We used to laugh at how these parents were raising their kids but you know they've raised wonderful little toddlers. So first of all I learned to be very accepting of how it's their responsibility, it's their own call. I'm not going to say, 'Oh, let him have that chocolate cake.' And at the same time I feel sorry for her because she's got so much work, and so much responsibility that I've become more sympathetic, and I think we've gotten a better relationship since she's become a mother and I haven't, that I can give her that extra, that ear, that pat on the back that she's doing it right and, you know, 'Don't worry about what so and so said about this and that'. So I've learned to grow up a little bit in my . . . relationships.

Nancy was also deeply engaged in other family relationships -- with aging grandparents, with a troubled sister, with a brother 11 years younger whom she felt she had helped to raise. Right now, the prospect of getting pregnant "absolutely terrifies" her, because she was not convinced it would be "the right thing to do." If she were closer to 40 than 30, and both she and her husband at that stage wanted children, then there was the possibility of adoption:

> I feel like we could adopt a five-year-old and still be ahead of the game. . . There's other options. It's just right now, we . . . leave it alone. And to me that's better than trying to rush something because the clock's ticking.

The oldest and the longest-married of this group was Dianne. At 32, she had been married for nine years, and seemed far more likely than the others to remain childless permanently. "I'm not interested in having children," she said.

The work and family history that led to this apparently committed position had been difficult. Dianne was an education graduate who taught high school for almost two years after graduation. She enjoyed the teaching, but not all the extracurricular activities in which her specialty involved her. So when her husband got a promising job in another city, she had few regrets about following him. Unable to get a teaching job, and having decided in any case that she would only take a teaching job which precisely met her specifications, she returned temporarily to the provincial government department which had given her summer jobs as a student. She returned as a clerk, but her own interest and the support of her boss led to much more challenging work as a civil engineering technologist. Meanwhile the company offering her husband his promising job fairly soon folded. At the time of the interview he was working as a labourer, as well as putting in many hours on the small home-based business he and Dianne had started, making and selling equipment for pets. Now Dianne, whose job had provided some security during her husband's work changes, was herself confronting unemployment within three years. As a (still) temporary public servant at a time when all provincial government departments were facing heavy cutbacks, she was making plans for another career change, perhaps involving a return to university.

Dianne described the previous eight years in terms of struggle, forced separations from her husband, very hard work, and very little money. Recently, she had begun to have health problems which were eventually traced to stress. Children were simply not an option. Like Nancy, Dianne had "nieces and nephews I can borrow and steal and spoil and send home when they get ugly." As the eldest of five, she felt she had some understanding of what small children were like. She too had coached her sister-in-law in childbirth, which was "very interesting," but which "still didn't make me feel like I was missing anything." Above all, though, she confronted heavy pressures on time and money.

> It's I think partly because we are *so* busy, and we have no time. We're just beginning now to have time to ourselves to do things together, and a little bit of money, because we started our business with almost no money, and so every bit of money it's made has been ploughed back into it. . . We're just sort of at a place now where we have a house . . . And our bills are all getting to, you know, so we actually are going to have a little bit of money next year or so. And then it's time to start planning to go back to school. Because my job is not going to last forever.

Dianne acknowledged that at this stage her decision was not irrevocable, and that she still had a couple of years to a possible deadline.

> Technically after you're 35 you're what they call a geriatric mother . . . and you become a more high-risk pregnancy . . . I don't know, I suppose I could change my mind . . . Actually, I would just as soon the deadline would pass, and it would be over so I wouldn't have to worry about making a choice, or an accident, heaven help us. . . I'm just not interested.

Involuntary childlessness

The women included in this category are those who actually want children, but are prevented by external circumstances from having them. For one of the women, her infertility was the cause of her childlessness. For the 11 others, childlessness was linked to whether or not they were in a relationship, and if they were, to the quality of the relationship.

Infertility was a major source of distress to Zehmia. Married before she graduated from university, she and her husband had been hoping for a pregnancy for many years. Major surgery five years earlier to treat her endometriosis had left her with, according to her doctor, a 60-per-cent chance of being able to conceive. Since then, further surgical treatment, and in vitro fertilization, had all been unsuccessful. She spoke of the cycles of hope and depression which characterized the years of trying to conceive.

> Right now when we're not trying anything, when I'm not under any treatment, I'm happy, because I don't think about it. But once you initiate some sort of treatment there's always an element of hope and then it's always a letdown and it's very difficult to handle that, you know . . . I think while I'm still young we can try a little bit more and then, after that. . . it's too taxing, emotionally and physically.

The work side of Zehmia's life had also been a disappointment. After graduating in arts, she tried -- and was continuing to try -- to enter law. She had been accepted by a university law faculty in another province at the time of her first surgery, and her husband, unable to move with her because of his own job, was also not supportive of her going alone. No law faculty in her home province had done more than put her on a waiting list. So she worked part-time as an office manager in her father's business, while intermittently taking university courses to try to upgrade her GPA. In the previous year, she and her sister had bought into a small business franchise, as a short-term venture aimed mostly at giving them both some business experience.

The career side of her life seemed likely to improve. She and her husband were making plans to move to the United States, where she thought she would have fewer difficulties entering a law faculty. And she was also more resigned to the prospect of permanent childlessness.

> I think the infertility problem . . . really destroyed about two or three years of my life, I mean constantly being obsessed with that. . . I've learned to accept, you know. I mean if you had seen me a few years ago, I was a basket case. But now . . .there's a little bit of, you know, when all your friends and your family are getting pregnant around you, there's still a little bit of jealousy, I think. But not as strong, and as devastating, as it used to be. I mean, how long can you do that for? You just become a mental case yourself. . . You learn to live with it, you learn to accept it, and you make the most of your life.

Zehmia did not rule out adoption as a possible solution. But the availability of babies from her own and her husband's ethnic group, who were also from a "good background," was likely to be very limited. The future, instead, seemed to be pointing in the direction of a move to the U.S., and, finally, a career. It would be a painful move in many respects, because she would be leaving a city in which she was part of a large and close family network, where she worked for her father and with her sister, and saw her mother nearly every day.

> My husband's adamant to go. He thinks that he's been supportive in everything that I've wanted to do and he said I should give him a chance and if it doesn't work we can always come back but he wants to go. . . It's because of him and I think maybe it's good for me. I really think that I need to go [to university] full-time. It's hard for me also to leave my dad, his [business] and all that. But I really think, like, I'm 30 years old now, and I think, you know, another three or four years I can study and then after that I think . . . I should be able to go into some sort of a career.

Unstable, unhappy relationships had given two women strong motivation to remain childless. For example, Claudia, a 30-year-old education graduate who gained a Masters in Business Administration after her first degree and has had a successful corporate career, said she thought she would certainly have had children by the time she was interviewed. The fact that she had not was because she did not feel her marriage was sufficiently stable. But she did not envisage a childless future -- and she also did not envisage raising children alone. Having children would require either the resolution of her present marital difficulties, or a new relationship.

Katherine, a 30-year-old teacher about to be married for the second time, said that the state of her first marriage was a major reason why she did not have children then.

> It definitely came up when we were married and basically knowing that our situation was unstable I just would not put myself in any kind of position where I would be having children. So I guess that was my decision . . .

> And in knowing, actually it was one of the considerations when I decided to leave my husband and decided to get divorced, 25 or 26, or however old I was, thinking that it may very well be 10 or 12 or 15 years before I meet somebody else and knowing that it was a decision, that I could very possibly be making a decision not to have children by making a decision to leave that marriage. But I still [feel] that it was the right decision. . . I always thought that I wanted to have a family. But I just didn't know if I would ever find the right person to [have] a family with.

Given her desire to have children, Katherine's story seemed headed for a happy ending. Her presence at the birth of her sister's first child, two years earlier, and her continuing strong bond with the baby, had given a powerful boost to her own hopes for children. And in her new relationship, she had met her own biggest requirement for readiness -- finding "the right person."

Uncommitted relationships may also be factors contributing to childlessness. Three of the women seemed to be involved in such relationships, although the exact nature of the relationships involved differed, and the judgement that they were uncommitted is clearly subjective. For example, Joan, a 30-year-old teacher, was living with someone (but not married) when last surveyed in 1992. When interviewed in mid-1994 she was living with someone else. She began teaching full-time immediately after graduation, and had just completed a Masters degree in education. She was considering the possibility of having children in the next few years, but it was "not an immediate desire." Her personal deadline for making a firm decision was when she was 35 -- "that would be when I would have to seriously think about it."

The judgement that Joan's own wishes might in any case be constrained by the nature of her relationship was guided by the observation, noted earlier, that for almost all the women with children in the survey sample, marriage was a prerequisite for parenthood. This was clearly the case for Amy, who was also in a live-in relationship, though of longer duration than Joan's. Amy commented that she had always wanted "marriage and babies" -- and still did. "I remind him once in a while," she said. "We're just living together . . . Yes, I do want babies . . . marriage, and then babies."

But for Amy, a more pressing issue than marriage was a permanent job. Amy was a librarian with two Masters degrees; at 30, although she had a solid work history in reputable academic libraries, her career was a long series of short-term contracts.

> Probably having a permanent position is more current, more of a worry. You know, when I see cute babies . . . oh, it'd be great to have a baby. And, I don't know if being married would be much different. My parents would approve a bit more. But I think probably getting settled in [a] career, so I *can* partake of maternity benefits . . . and have something to go back to, you know.

Carrie was a 30-year-old psychologist who completed her doctoral studies in 1992, having gone directly from her degree in education into graduate studies. She had gone to university for 11 consecutive years, and had then taken up a permanent position at an educational institution. Carrie described herself as being in a "long-term relationship," and said that marriage was "probably going to come in the next year." For Carrie, the prospect of marriage opened up the possibility of children -- a possibility she was now beginning to evaluate.

> I guess I always was so certain, well, of course you know I'll have children. Now . . . it really is more of an option *not* to. . . I don't *have* to. It really is a choice and so with that comes considering the possibility of not. Which is something I had never considered before, you know. So I wouldn't say, oh, for sure, you know, let's bet $100 that I will have a family even ever. I think it's still likely, but not certain.

For Carrie, this evaluation was part of a struggle to reconcile her justifiably high career expectations with her need for a relationship, and, more specifically, with the demands of the particular relationship she had. Though her career was at a much higher level than that of her prospective partner, she considered that she put more effort into the relationship than he did, and that this had some cost for her career.

> You've only got so much time and so much purpose, and if I was not in a relationship right now, I would be finding something else that's reinforcing. Like, publishing research results, is something that I am conscious that I have put off because now my weekends are spent going skating or shopping, or, you know, doing things together. I'm very aware that I accomplish more academically when I'm single. . . But it's a choice and I'm satisfied with it. You know, meaning there's always some loss but I think . . . this is a more acceptable loss to me, than losing this relationship and publishing something.

So now, Carrie considered, she was "thinking relationship," rather than "thinking career": "You know, even while I'm doing career, I'm thinking, oh gee, I should cook that for supper." The broader struggle was between traditional social values and her own non-traditional choices -- a struggle which seemed likely to carry over into her planning for a baby.

> I want to do it all. I want to work full-time and I want to be home with the child full-time. . . And some compromise would have to be reached. . . Whether he would take time off work, we've talked about it, you know, and he would. But I want to do it all. I really do. And I can't. And I would have to decide. . .

Absence of a long-term relationship was a significant factor in the family decision-making of six of the women interviewed. All but one of them felt (with varying degrees of intensity) that they would like to have children, but all saw being single as a drawback. [1] There also seemed to be a connection between their marital status and their career paths, though the question of causality would be difficult to determine.

Bev when interviewed was 34, and separated from her husband. An education graduate, she had taught for three years in a rural community before moving back to the city to be closer to her family. Unable to get a full-time teaching job, unwilling to work as a substitute teacher, and needing a break from the classroom after some stressful experiences, she turned to "another love," accounting. Because she didn't make the quota in her local faculty of business, she instead took a technical college program and was about to write her Certified Management Accountant examination. But in accounting, too, she had not been able to find work. Instead, she had been working in a department store. She described herself as barely able to make ends meet, and needing financial help from her parents. Her social life was constrained by her finances -- "I don't feel there's money for fun right now." She suffered intermittently from depression. Her immediate hopes were for a job, a paycheque -- and a love life. "I would love to be happily married to the right guy that is going to last forever this time," she said. She would also like one or two children -- but would not rush into a relationship in order to get pregnant.

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[1] Obviously the issue of sexual orientation is relevant here. One reason why a woman may be unmarried, or at any rate not in a heterosexual relationship offering the prospect of children, is because she is a lesbian. However, for the reasons outlined earlier (Chapter 4), a direct question about sexual orientation was considered inappropriate. Instead, in cases where sexual orientation had not voluntarily been made clear by the woman herself, she was asked only in general terms about "relationships," with no assumptions made that such relationships would be with men. Questions about children also did not assume that their arrival would be in some way contingent on marriage.

Like Bev, the other five women in this group were also not currently in serious relationships. Unlike Bev, they had never been married, and had all made career decisions after graduating from university that seemed to have profoundly influenced their personal lives. For example, Janice took her arts degree directly into the faculty of law. After finishing her law degree and a year of articles, and confronting a tight job market, she went to England for a year to take a Masters degree in law. Within two months of her return to Canada, she had been hired by the firm in which she was now, at age 28, an associate. The reciprocal influence of career path and personal life seemed particularly clear.

> When I was looking ahead to make the decisions I did, when I was in arts and going into law school, that was part of the reason, because I knew it would take a lot of time. And I knew I didn't have anyone or anyone serious, seriously involved with that I was concerned about. So I thought, well, I have the time now and I have the opportunity to do it so I'll just keep on plugging away. Plus I didn't really know what else to do if I didn't go with the law path.

But when asked if the personal side of her life had unfolded in the way she had expected, she said:

> It wouldn't have surprised me if I would have been married by now, but it just hasn't unfolded that way. And it's not like I've made a conscious decision, oh, I'm not going to get married because I want to pursue my career now. [It's] just, you know, if I'd met the right person then it would have happened.

Children would raise other conflicts with her working life:

> I can't imagine not having kids. . . Yet . . . it would be a very tough decision to make because I enjoy my work so much and I can't see myself not working, yet I can't see myself working the way I do now and having kids. So it's a very big commitment and it's something that I'd have to think through.

Deborah and Carmen were both teachers. Both considered that their early years in their careers affected their personal lives. Deborah, now 29, thought as a teenager that "you meet a nice guy when you're 18 or 19, you date for four or five years, you get married, you have the 2.5 kids and . . . you have a happy family." Deborah attributes the failure of this scenario to unfold in her life at least partly to the time she devoted to her career when she was starting out.

> Career has been very important, something I've latched on to. And I mean one reason . . . there's a lot of self-esteem that I get from it. I do get a lot of rewards, and so why not? I'll put the extra time where I know I'm going to feel good about that, you know. But at the other end, you end up wearing yourself down . . . So I guess it's everybody's wish to get a balance somewhere along the way.

Carmen, now 32, got her first teaching job through a rural school district that sent her to a three-roomed school in a little hamlet. She taught almost every subject, had no preparation time, and in addition was the girls' coach for every single sport.

> There was no way that I could have ever had . . . a relationship there, because of how demanding the job was. And I was . . . fairly far away . . . It was just a very busy time . . . and I enjoyed what I was doing so it wasn't something that I felt I was missing out on.

Carmen had since made two moves, to successively larger centres. She had also had some long-term relationships, but not anything she wanted to make permanent:

> I'm very happy with the way my life is, and I'm a very independent person who enjoys . . . being on my own and doing things . . . And I think too in a small town . . . sometimes it's tough to find just that right person.

Both Deborah and Carmen were wondering whether they would have children. Both relished their contact with young nieces, and acknowledged that it was a great advertisment for the attractions of motherhood; but both also expressed doubts about likelihood and desirability. "I'm really not sure if I want to have kids or not," said Carmen. "And I think it will definitely depend on when I get married, and my husband, and where our finances are and things like that." Deborah said:

> I think as I'm approaching my 30s . . . you start to ask that question, well, you know, do I want to have kids now? And, OK, if I have a kid like in two years, how old am I going to be when they're a teenager, and that sort of thing. So that's weighing real heavy right now, the question of kids or not kids . . . Not that right now I'm in a position to be deciding that, but I'm at a point where I start to wonder, do I put that dream away now? . . . It does get me down in some ways, I think. You know, I've made some choices, and as a result . . . I may not have kids, so maybe I need to start, be accepting that a little bit more? I guess on the other hand . . . maybe I need to be more flexible with it too. So what if I am 55 and my kids are 10 years old? . . . But I see myself more and more saying, maybe I'm not. Maybe I'm going to have to say no to that. In terms of relationships, I certainly would appreciate someone else in my life right now. [Being] single and on your own, and I think in a high-stress job like this, it can be real tough some days. So yeah, it would be very nice. And I'm certainly hopeful that one day soon Mr. Wonderful's going to come around.

Rosemary, now 30, and an arts graduate, originally expected to work in journalism or advertising. But a summer job on a daily newspaper caused journalism to lose much of its appeal. After a succession of temporary jobs, and as a "last resort," she joined her parents in becoming a realtor. The job had not gone well. "I'm making a living, I'm doing well but I don't enjoy it at all," she said. "But -- you have to put bread on the table." By far the biggest disadvantage of the job was its damaging effect on her personal life.

> You really don't have a personal life in this business if you want to do well. Nights and weekends, long weekends, holidays, you have to be available 24 hours a day. So I really don't have a social life, don't have weekends I go out, don't go out evenings, which is when everybody goes out. And really, you don't meet anybody single in the business because you're dealing with married people and couples who are buying or selling houses. . . If I had to do it all over again, I would have done it much different. Just because I always wanted kids, always wanted a family.

Rosemary felt she was not qualified for anything except sales, but didn't want to move to a job with better hours because of the state of the economy -- "you read . . . the papers and you see you're lucky to be making a living at all." The question of relationships and children was an extremely sensitive one for Rosemary, who could "feel the clock ticking."

> If I'm not in a relationship, a serious one, by the time I'm 35 -- not that I don't think I'll have any love relationships or whatever, but I think that will probably be it in terms of meeting someone and starting a family and all that. Because you're getting to the age, well, even now. . . where most of the men you're seeing are divorced, already have kids, they don't want to be starting a family. You know, that's just reality, the age group of your peers. . . So 35 is kind of the make-or-break [age].

Catherine, now 30, was an arts graduate for whom a long-cherished goal was to work overseas. About a year after she graduated, she went, under the auspices of an internationally known church organization, to teach English in a Third World country. After two years characterized chiefly by extreme cultural isolation and physical deprivation ("the work I was doing was surviving") she and her North American colleagues had to leave abruptly as the country broke into civil war. This was a traumatic end to an experience which had the most profound psychological and spiritual effect on her life. She explains:

> I made my decision to stay there, I [was going] to go through this every three months, for the whole two years I was there I'd remake this decision because I knew that the changes I was going through . . . I was learning more

> about myself and the world and life in the short, compact, incredibly intense, very difficult time, than some people take their whole lives to learn. . . And I wanted that.

Coming home, however, was traumatic and shocking in other ways. "I think for three months I just cried every single day," she said. "Just all the time. And I couldn't function. I couldn't function at all." Slowly, after this emotional convalescence, she found some short-term jobs, but nothing that had any future and nothing that would make use of what she saw as her assets -- her travel experience and her intimate knowledge of the region where she had lived for two years. Finally she returned to university to complete an after-degree program in education. After a series of short-term contracts and some substitute teaching, she finally established some measure of continuity with a full-time teaching job in a private school. The school paid significantly less than public school board rates, gave no benefits, and laid her off at the start of every summer. Asked where she saw herself in five years, she cited her overseas experience as teaching her that "you just have no concept of what's going to happen." Catherine said she had always felt she had an adventurous enough spirit to be open to anything. But on the other hand, the uncertainty surrounding her present job was taking its toll.

> Part of this constant unemployment -- because they lay you off every summer . . . and you have no idea if you're going to be hired back or not, so part of that is just . . . part of me doesn't want to risk anymore, I'm tired of that . . . I want to be secure enough in the world and

> maybe not to have to worry about that. . . So it's one of those kinds of battles. Like do I want to take the risk and not go back there or just make myself find something different or is there just nothing out there, that [I'd] better spend another year and see what happens then. I don't know those answers. . .

In view of these struggles, both psychic and financial, questions about relationships and children seemed almost beside the point. Catherine was living with four other people in a house in an inner-city housing co-operative. She was very involved as a community volunteer. It was, she said, in many ways "just an ideal way to live," and it was perhaps modifying other, earlier, aspirations. "I had always seen myself as being a mother," she said. "I suppose the older I get, the less is the feeling."

Infertility, the only likely reason for childlessness among married women a generation or two ago, affected only one of the married women in the group described in this chapter. For the women interviewed here, there were many reasons for remaining childless, and for them, as for the women who had already made the transition to motherhood, the influence of their work histories was significant. In many cases difficulties experienced in establishing a career, or the need to accommodate further education or career shifts, resulted not only in postponed pregnancies but also in prolonged singlehood -- a further barrier to children. But in some cases also, successful establishment of both career and relationship led to a fear of upsetting the status quo, and concern about the life changes that motherhood would likely bring. The childless women described here led very different lives from women with children, in terms of the time, energy and independence they had available to pursue their own goals. Some of them were acutely aware of the contrast, and reluctant to make the changes that a baby would mean.

This chapter, with its focus on women who are either "childless" or "childfree", provides a contrast to the four preceding chapters, which described the lives of women with children. As Chapter 4 made clear, all these women had much in common. They were well-educated, middle-class professional women whose life course trajectories, whose "biographies," might have been expected to be very similar. But the biographies did not read the same -- at least in part because "well-educated" and "professional" are terms which mask major practical differences. Analysis of the biographies, and responses to the questions which impelled this research, are the subjects of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 10

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research involves a group of 64 university-educated, middle-class women in their early 30s. At the time they were interviewed, 36 of them had children or were pregnant with their first child. The others, most of whom were married or in stable relationships, had no children. Forty-five of these women were interviewed in depth and in person; the remaining 19 participated in shorter telephone interviews.

The interview sample was drawn from a larger group of women university graduates who had participated, between 1985 and 1992, in five successive surveys conducted as part of a larger study concerned with the transition from school to work. The surveys provided extensive work history data for all respondents, and also marked other major life course transitions -- notably to marriage and parenthood. By 1992, it was apparent that, for the women graduates at least, their educational and occupational choices played some part in the timing of the transition to motherhood. Specifically, the education graduates, most of whom went on to become elementary school teachers, were more likely to have children than graduates of the other faculties represented in the sample. And they were also more likely than the other mothers in the group to continue with paid employment, either full- or part-time, after having children.

The approach of this research was thus primarily interpretive: a major goal was to understand *how* occupational choice and work history contributed to women's decisions about having children, and, for those who did have children, to subsequent decisions about combining paid work and family responsibilities. Of particular significance here is the fact that the women are all university-educated, in a range of traditional and non-traditional occupations. By virtue of their educational background alone, they would seem to have more choices available to them, as workers and as mothers. They would, collectively, be expected to have better jobs, and more financial resources available to contract out some of their family work. As university-educated women they might also be expected to have more liberal views on gender and, hence, be less likely to fall into traditional gender roles in their families. The dissertation shows, however, that this distinctive and relatively privileged background did *not* result in either unusual attachment to paid employment or "liberated" family patterns.

The particular challenges of the combination of paid work and family responsibilities -- in the terms of life course researchers, the synthesis of work and family "careers" -- represent challenges also both for life course and feminist theorists. Life course theorists operating primarily from the framework of educational and employment institutions have difficulty accommodating women's experiences outside these domains. And feminist theorists, while making women's experiences their starting point, have yet to get beyond the metaphor of the "double life" to explain the ways women synthesize work and family careers. A second goal of this research, with its focus on women's choices and their actions as they confront the transition to motherhood, was to critically examine the "double life" metaphor in terms of its relevance for the women in the study.

The workplace and the transition to motherhood

For the women interviewed for this study, the workplace seemed to exert a considerable influence both on the timing of the transition to motherhood, and in subsequent employment choices. Specifically both occupational choice and the process of getting established in a career seemed to be important, though they worked in apparently contradictory ways. In terms of the timing of the first pregnancy, the successful establishment of a career appeared to be an important prerequisite. This was most clearly demonstrated by the teachers in the group, for whom a permanent teaching position, and a continuous contract with a school board -- both of which were generally achieved after two years' continuous service -- opened the door to generous union-negotiated maternity leave benefits. Women whose career paths were less straightforward, and women whose careers took longer to get established, were generally the ones to prolong the postponement of motherhood -- and this was true for some of the teachers also. But workplace influences also appeared to work in the opposite direction. A small proportion of the women got pregnant at least partly *because* they were not in full-time jobs; others, having spent years successfully establishing careers, were then reluctant to change the status quo by having a baby. Some of the women (described in Chapter 9) who were continuing to prolong their postponement of motherhood expressed concerns about the likely loss of independence and autonomy, and the changes that would have to occur in their working lives, in a way that seemed prescient, given the experiences of the mothers outlined in the preceding chapters.

The fact that university education is a factor in women's delayed fertility has been documented in demographic research (for example, Gee, 1986). What this research adds is an important proviso: postponement of the transition to motherhood may depend on the *type* of education. Education graduates are less prone to prolonged postponement of pregnancy than are engineering or business graduates, for example -- even though the length of their education is the same. The decisive factors seem to be the kind of job which the degree opens up, the receptiveness of the labour market at the time of graduation, and the time it takes to get established.

Motherhood and paid work

All the women interviewed had university degrees, and almost all managed, with more or less difficulty, to establish professional careers. For the women who had children, motherhood was not a flight from failure in the labour market. Most of them, at the time they became pregnant, were in paid work and confronting a decision as to whether or not they would continue it. As a group, they had more latitude in this decision than would, for example, working-class women whose incomes would be more critical to family survival. Though several of those who chose to continue full-time work cited financial reasons, they were also explicit about the relativity of their financial "need." And though there was no reliable data on household incomes, those who chose to leave formal paid employment were in general no more affluent than those who chose to continue: the wife of a banker chose full-time work; the wife of a lawyer chose part-time work; the wife of an electrician was home-based. On the face of it, the decision about paid work seemed to be based more on the individual woman's views about the obligations and responsibilities of motherhood (discussed below). The combination of work and family responsibilities took one of three possible forms, as discussed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. Some of the women were in full-time paid employment, some had formally organized part-time paid work, and some had no formal ties to a single employer. Most women in the latter group used their homes as a base for some kind of paid work, for example short-term professional contracts, a home-based business or the production of crafts.

From a life-course perspective, the issue of career continuity is relevant here. Given that all the women with children took maternity leave generally lasting six months at least, it could be argued that any prospect of career continuity was already dashed. However, since paid maternity leave for Canadian women is a legal entitlement after a qualifying period of full-time paid employment, and is relatively commonplace in most work organizations, it seems fair to assume that the leave itself is not a source of discontinuity. The women (described in Chapter 6) who resumed their full-time jobs after maternity leave were able to maintain a continuous connection with the work for which they were trained, as well as fulfilling their responsibilities as mothers. But the combination of work and family responsibilities was extremely stressful and difficult to achieve. As one of these women commented, "I know where 'sick and tired' comes from." As Duffy, Mandell and Pupo (1989) also found, the decision to continue full-time work did not appear to derive from feminist consciousness or more liberal views of gender roles. These women worked at least partly from a sense of entitlement and professional pride. But they also felt that they were less productive at work than they had been before their children arrived, and most were unhappy with -- or at least ambivalent about -- the kind of mothering they were able to do. Like the 45 per cent of full-time employed respondents to the 1988 National Child Care Study cited in Chapter 2, all of these women, irrespective of their views on mothering, would have preferred to be working part-time. They continued to work full-time either because their jobs could not be converted to part-time, or (in the case of teachers, who would technically have been able to make the conversion) because they were reluctant to risk their job security in an uncertain economic climate.

Career continuity was also available, with much less stress, to the women described in Chapter 7, who were in formal part-time paid work. Significantly, these women were in traditionally female occupations in which conversion to part-time work during the childrearing years was almost institutionalized. But the implicit assumption of this part-time conversion was that it would allow women to take on full responsibility for family work. In the same way that the so-called "mommy track" for corporate careers (Schwartz, 1989) merely affirms the belief that family work is women's work, so the ready conversion to part-time work in female occupations begins to make these same occupations look like "mommy" jobs. The question is whether "mommy" jobs are necessarily undesirable. As Duffy and Pupo (1992) have noted, much predominantly female part-time work in the service sector is unskilled or deskilled, poorly paid and insecure. But female *professions*, particularly if they have strong unions or professional associations, may offer part-time work of a different quality altogether. In fact, though traditionally female occupations do tend to pay less well than jobs in which men predominate, the conversion to part-time work in occupations like teaching is *not* necessarily the path to downward mobility. Where pay and benefits are covered by collective agreement, and where the later resumption of full-time work is also possible, there may be no real career costs to reduced participation.

Career continuity was not an option for most of the home-based mothers (described in Chapter 8) who resigned from their original careers on or around the births of their children. For these women, the years of child-rearing seemed to be a watershed. Of the 11 women in this group, only three -- two teachers and a sales representative -- seemed likely to resume, some time in the future, the work for which they originally trained. For all the others, the home-based, child-rearing interlude was a radical career break. It was difficult to tell whether or not the break was freely chosen. Some of the pre-children jobs were perceived as "anti-family" -- too dangerous physically or too demanding psychologically. Some of the old jobs were simply no longer satisfying. In these cases the child-rearing interlude was likely to be used as a respite and an opportunity to plan for a new and different future.[1] But for some of these women (for example, the engineer or the laboratory research technician) technological and other changes in their former jobs would make it difficult for them to return -- even if they wished to do so, and even if potential employers would be prepared to overlook their years of absence from the workplace.

Several of the studies cited in Chapter 2 (for example, Robinson, 1986; Stewart and Greenhalgh, 1984) suggest that delaying their return to paid employment will result in significant downward mobility for many women, with the negative consequences increasing with the interval between jobs. What the literature fails to address, however, is the situation of women like these, who are not attempting to return to their old jobs, but who have the resources and the educational capital to invest in a new career. One interpretation of this situation could well be that even in a new career they will be starting from scratch, at entry level, and, in labour market terms, perhaps well below the position they might have attained had they stayed in paid employment. But such an interpretation also implicitly devalues the experience(s) they *have* had outside the paid labour market. As well as their family responsibilities, almost all of these women retained some informal professional connection to paid work as well. This study, through the experiences of Melanie, Jessica and Shelley (described in Chapter 8), also offers a timely corrective to popular perceptions of the advantages of doing paid work from home. Apart from the practical difficulties of doing professional, "workplace-style" work in the constant company of very young children, these women lacked support from their spouses. While husbands traditionally have not appreciated regular housework and childcare as "work," the spouses in this research did not recognize even *paid* home-based work as work.

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[1] This is not to suggest that child-rearing *should* only be considered as an "interlude," and that a return to some kind of paid employment is both preferred and inevitable. The workplace-oriented perspective of this comment is justified by the intention to return to work expressed by the women in this group. More generally, all the women in the study were in paid employment, and part of a larger study *of* paid employment, before they became mothers. The interaction between paid work and family work is central to this research.

From the perspective of the labour market, each of the three possible work/family combinations involves a significant tradeoff for women. It is an observation worth repeating that the combination of full-time work and family responsibilities is unduly difficult for women because they bear most of the burden of family work. In addition, the perception that they are more interested in their families than in their careers is likely to prejudice their career progress, though career advancement was not being sought by the full-time workers in this study. As Brannen (1987) points out, these women, often personally committed to an ideology of motherhood which assigned them full family responsibility, lacked a countervailing ideology which would legitimate an independent, upwardly mobile working life. Women who work part-time are likely to experience less stress, but they are confined to traditional female occupations, and women who withdraw from formal paid employment altogether confront diminished job prospects if (as is the intention of the home-based mothers in this study) they try to re-enter the labour force. These women are also acutely aware that the work they do for their families is not valued in the market place. Part of the struggle of the home-based women to achieve some contact with the world of paid work is, as one woman described it, to feel "like a professional."

The contribution of this study, because it involves women in a range of traditional and non-traditional occupations, is to reconstruct these work/family combinations in terms of particular career choices. On the basis of their original career choices, full-time paid work is the only way women in non-traditional careers (like engineering or business) can maintain career continuity. Conversion to part-time work is usually not possible; the only other alternative is to withdraw from formal paid work when they have children -- and this in fact was the choice of most of the non-traditional career women in the group. The women in the group who made more traditional career choices (for example the teachers, the nurse, the speech pathologist) were able to maintain strong, continuing connections to their careers. Generous maternity leave provisions, and the availability of part-time work, made the combination of paid and family work much more viable. For many of these women, the conversion from part-time to full-time work when their children were older, with few penalties to be paid for the part-time period, seemed entirely likely.

The irony here is clear. Traditional career choices expose women to serious practical disadvantages: jobs done mainly by women are generally less well paid and have shorter career ladders. But these same jobs may be far more responsive to the needs of women with children. They tend also to be the kinds of jobs which, as Dale (1987) pointed out in Chapter 2, have occupationally-based, rather than organizationally-based internal labour markets. Again, much of the advantage hinges on the ease of their conversion to part-time work. Glass's (1990) findings, cited in Chapter 2, suggest that female occupations do *not* necessarily offer women greater flexibility. But her study used aggregated data on a variety of unspecified occupational groupings. A particular focus on women's unionized (or at least professionally regulated) professions might have been more illuminating.

However, women who make non-traditional career choices may enjoy many of the benefits (in terms of pay and promotion opportunities) associated with male-dominated occupations -- but only until they have children. Then they seem to confront insurmountable barriers. This certainly accords with Devine's (1992) findings on women professional engineers and scientists. This may well be why so few of them, in the larger sample from which the interview group was drawn, actually had children by 1992. Their options are to struggle on in full-time employment, or to withdraw altogether. Again, it is significant that, as a group, these women might all have been expected to continue in full-time work on the basis of their career investment alone. Instead their decisions were heavily conditioned by the actual careers they originally chose.

In a sense the consequences of these different occupational choices validate the policy shift in the United States from affirmative action programs (which sought to introduce more women to a wider range of occupations) to a focus on "comparable worth" (the U.S. equivalent of pay equity) which involves a more just evaluation of the paid work that women actually do. (Acker, 1989, Blum, 1991). The evidence of the present research suggests that encouraging women to enter non-traditional occupations (the aim of affirmative action programs) without also making those occupations responsive to the needs of employees with family responsibilities is self-defeating in the long run.

Ideologies of motherhood and practices of mothering

With very few exceptions, the women in this study took primary responsibility for child care (as well as almost all other household work). The entrenching of traditional gender roles -- family work on women's shoulders, men's work careers the privileged ones even in two-career families -- emerged as a clear pattern through most of the interviews. In fact, the extent to which these traditional patterns were entrenched was surprising, given the level of education and the employment histories of the group. Most of these women operated from the conviction, not only that child care was their responsibility, but that they would do it best. The conviction of their own ability seemed to be based less on any biological imperative than on their sense of obligation and their sense of their own competence. A significant theoretical contribution of this study is to suggest the source, and possible reasons for the persistence, of this conviction.

The sense of obligation derives at least partly from the fact that almost all of the women with children "chose" to have them. This fact has serious implications, some of which can best be seen by resort to an analogy. Guests who are uninvited may still be welcome, but there is less of an obligation to clean the house and prepare a festive meal; uninvited guests are expected to fit in. But invited guests mean self-imposed social obligations. Women who "choose" to get pregnant are as it were dealing with invited rather than uninvited guests. There is often an intense preoccupation with the "right" time to have the baby, because there is a clear understanding of the expected impact of motherhood. Readiness, as Currie (1988) noted, partly involves a particular configuration of material circumstances. For these women, readiness also involves positioning themselves to be able to devote time and attention to the baby. Because of what they may have to give up, there is considerable investment in the decision to have a baby. Furthermore, according to the women (described in Chapter 9) who are still deciding about motherhood, it is the woman, rather than the couple, who makes the choice. This provides one more reason *not* to be surprised when it is the woman in the family who feels obligated to take full responsibility for the baby. And of course, she is also structurally in a position to start the job from the baby's birth. All the mothers in the study were able to take advantage of extended maternity leave, as discussed in Chapter 3, to "learn" their own babies. Precisely as Rossiter (1988) described, in the day-to-day absence of husbands and fathers this allowed them to develop expertise which virtually guaranteed their ongoing engagement as primary caregivers.

From this auspicious beginning, arguments for the women's sense of competence to provide child care move to the fact that, as noted above, these women are all university-educated and with some history as career women. Many of them are teachers or former teachers, who could be expected to be more knowledgeable about child development and bring a more professional approach to meeting children's needs. There is, also as noted above, frequently a considerable investment in the decision to have a baby. Several of these women appeared to view their mothering as a "career." Others spoke of the importance of "teaching" their children and "providing enrichment." They would require that any caregiver outside the family circle meet their own particularly middle-class and intellectually-oriented high standards. Not surprisingly, few outsiders would measure up. Though the evidence from the interviews is only suggestive, there seem to be several factors which in combination help to explain why this group of women, who might have been expected to resist traditional family roles, are instead apparently conforming. The factors include the heavy investment in the decision to have a child, strong feelings of responsibility for both decision and child, access as educated women to considerable information about childrearing, the predisposition to treat it as another career, as well as (in the case of most of the women in the group) the financial resources to devote some time to the job. In this sense they are ideally placed to articulate their mothering to the middle-class social and intellectual requirements of the school system, as Griffith and Smith (1991) describe. They are also, as Griffith and Smith go on to point out, the kinds of mothers whose standards are very hard for mothers with less time and fewer resources to match.

Finally, if childcare within these families is mainly women's work, so is the supplementary childcare provided by alternative caregivers. Almost all the mothers who needed alternative childcare called on (female) relatives or women providing babysitting in their own homes. Day care centres were rarely used. Thus child care was not only done by women, but it was done almost exclusively in private. The patterns of child care chosen in fact closely reflected the findings of the 1988 National Child Care Study and the 1990 General Social Survey cited in Chapter 2.

The reproduction of constraint

Much of the foregoing, concerned as it is with choices and constraint, brings Giddens' (1984) outline of structuration theory to mind. As discussed in Chapter 3, the theory views structures (the organizing properties of social systems) as constituted in action. Thus social systems both express and are expressed in "the routines of daily social life". Constraint refers to the limits placed on the range of options open to an actor. Most relevant here is Giddens' understanding of structures being *contained* in action. Thus the "routines of daily social life" are themselves the constraining structures, reproduced every time they are repeated. In most of the households involved in this study, these routines would ensure, on a daily basis, that the person who prepares the baby's breakfast or copes with her diaper rash or consults with the babysitter will do all those things the next time and the next time. Repetition builds speed, efficiency and competence, all of which become the basis for ongoing responsibility. The assumption of responsibility for these daily routines then limits the possibility of performance of a range of *other* things which *other* people will then do. The fact that these daily tasks could be performed by any caring adult is beside the point; what tends to happen, as Rossiter (1988) points out, is that the structures of the workplace and the isolated nuclear family together position the mother to become the expert, and hence the responsible one.

The well-educated middle-class mothers in this study, as suggested above, seem to take on this responsibility in a unique way. Because of who they are, because of the material and educational resources to which they have access, many of them become "career" mothers. They also become, in Giddens' terms, implicated in the perpetuation of the ideology which constrains them. They in fact become powerful torchbearers of this ideology, because they can "choose" to do what, ideologically, they are supposed to do.

Women as actors

Caring for children is essential work. It is also immensely rewarding for anyone willing to invest time in it. But it is an activity that demands time, and that precludes many other activities and interests to the extent that it is not shared. It is important to understand the degree to which responsibility for child care constrains women -- and the dangerous, daily ease with which that responsibility is reinforced and reproduced. But Giddens also reminds us, as do Duffy, Mandell and Pupo (1989), that however constrained they many be, however limited their options, women are not passive victims, acted on by deterministic structures over which they have no control. Structures, Giddens points out, are both constraining and enabling. And while the search for what is enabling in structures which constrain has a pious and functionalist side, *not* to search means leaving in obscurity the wide scope of women's action.

Thus a focus on constraining structures would leave the discussion of this study at the point where child care is discovered to be both women's responsibility and a private activity. This *does* represent the experience of several of the women in the study who worked in full-time paid employment. These women were separated from their children for most of the day in workplaces from which the needs and concerns of children were totally excluded. But other women -- those described in Chapter 7, for example, who had part-time paid employment -- not only moved freely between private and public domains, but also, in at least a figurative sense, brought their children to work with them. The responsiveness of traditionally female occupations to the needs of mothers with children has already been noted. This responsiveness is at least partly due to the presence of a community of women who share similar interests. They have acted on their work environment to *make* it responsive. Thus Gail, the speech pathologist quoted in Chapter 7, spoke of her pleasure at being at work with women with whom she could discuss her concerns about her baby. Even more telling is this comment from Barbara, six months pregnant with her first child, and working as an elementary school teacher:

> The other night I had to go to a meeting and. . . the Grade 3 teacher said to me, 'Well, I'll go and you don't have to, and you can stay home and relax. And I thought, isn't that neat? . . . Or, 'I'll do your supervision for you, you must be tired.' Or, just talking about, you know, they get together and they talk about my little one cried all night or whatever and they're bouncing ideas off each other and things like that. And I don't see that sharing in other [professions].

Hessing (1991), as noted in Chapter 2, found a similar sharing among the women clerical workers she studied. But for the clerical workers the sharing was limited by constraints on the intrusion of the family in the office, and fears among some of the women that they would be seen to be more committed to their families than to their work. Teachers' conversations happen in situations structured as social -- recess time, the noon hour and after school. But in any case teachers' greater autonomy -- and the fact that their *work* involves children -- would probably account for the freedom they feel to be supportive of family concerns.

Away from the workplace, single-family households may be isolating places for women with children. But as Lucy and Annette (described in Chapter 8) discovered, neighbourhoods don't have to be. Even the solitary day home caregiver can operate in a much more social way when she gets together with her colleagues, as Shelley (Chapter 8) found. Local communities are sometimes rich social resources for women with children, thanks to the agency of the women themselves. To continue to view the work of childcare as private (and hence somehow *not* social and interactive) is to disparage by ignoring the often highly social and interactive quality of many women's lives. It ignores the public work that many women do to improve their communities. It ignores the extent to which women are public figures in mediating between unambiguously public institutions (like schools or health clinics) and their families (Griffith and Smith, 1991; Everingham, 1994). It ignores the extent to which the public world of work enters directly into the private world of family as women (like those described in Chapter 8) use their homes to make products for sale, to prepare a university course, to organize art workshops for teachers, to work on urban design contracts. In short, as the evidence of this study suggests, the view from the woman's standpoint makes the private/public distinction much less clear.

Women and the "double life"

If women in this research are managing to blur the public/private boundary by their actions in both domains, how closely does the "double life" metaphor fit them? The question requires another look at the way they combine their working lives and their family lives.

Women who are locked in to full-time employment in workplaces which are not "family-friendly" (and most still are not) must work their family responsibilities around the demands of their employers. These are the women who must get their children ready to go to the sitter at 8 a.m., who fit grocery shopping into their noon hour breaks, who vacuum and fold laundry at 10 p.m., and who have no time for personal leisure or recreation. They also have much less time for the best things about motherhood, which require a physical presence in the child's life. These are the women like Tania, described in Chapter 6, whose hours were "a lot longer" before she had her first child, but who still is away from home 10 hours a day. They are like Carla, also described in Chapter 6, whose meteoric career progress landed her in a position which precluded any reduction of work hours. As Hagestad (1992) pointed out in Chapter 3, their lives are geared to the temporal rhythms of the workplace. The point here is that their *whole* lives, not merely their "work" lives, are lived at this fast pace. This is not so much a "double life" as no life at all. The problem, for the women described in Chapter 6, seemed to be not so much a problem of "bifurcated consciousness," of trying to do two things at once, as a problem of pace and of time. Things are not done because of a lack of time. Some of the things not done are things that must be done slowly.

In contrast, the women like those described in Chapter 8 who are home-based tend to live lives which are temporally geared to the rhythms of small children. For most of them, this means a much slower daily pace. It also means extending personal deadlines, delaying plans until children are older and more independent, and until their mothers are willing to break step with them. For some of them, in Dorothy's words, this "isn't enough, by any means." Most of them needed, and found, some link to paid work. But most of them are not living "double lives," either. In their lives, too, things do not get done. But in the case of home-based mothers the things that are hardest to do are things that must be done fast. In general the decision to be home-based means a re-framing of time. Many of the home-based mothers planned to remain home-based for several years, until all their children were in school. Yet most of them described this phase as a short time in the total span of their lives and their children's lives. Their vision of the world of paid employment was that it was waiting for them, not that it might have passed them by.

The women, noted in the previous section, who were able to move most easily between their working lives and their family lives were the women working part-time. Here the image is one of a relatively easy shifting of gears between the temporal rhythms of workplace and children. It is tempting, but too easy, to suggest that it is once again the option of interesting part-time work which works best, this time in terms of its temporal fit with family responsibilities. For one thing, there are too many exceptions to the categories of temporal rhythm suggested above. For example, Lucy, a home-based mother, constructed a very busy schedule for her two children; they all tended to live at a workplace-like pace, even though Lucy did not have a paying job. Kate, a full-time teacher described in Chapter 6, made time for leisure in her schedule, and commented that she always made sure she "had a life."

The one woman in the study who did seem to lead a "double life" was Melanie. In her case the doubleness stemmed from her passionate commitment to be physically available to her child at all times, combined with her determination to run a business from home. Her descriptions, reproduced in Chapter 8, of conducting business-related telephone conversations with a toddler clinging to her leg vividly demonstrate the difficulty of combining two sets of conflicting demands -- or working at two different speeds. This really is what Saraceno (1991), cited in Chapter 3, would call "dual presence."

In general, however, the metaphor of the "double life" does not describe the women in this study. They are leading single, individual, unified lives, which are more or less busy and more or less fulfilling. Much more useful, as a way to think about their navigation of this passage through the life course, is the concept of temporal rhythm. They are all moving through the transition to motherhood, but they are not all travelling at the same pace.

The "speed" metaphor is useful for another reason. The reality is that nobody has more than one life. To suggest that women lead "double lives," to speak of their "bifurcated consciousness," is to suggest that they inhabit some special psychic space which enables them to be in two places at once. While many women know exactly what Smith (1987) meant when she spoke of her own particular bifurcated consciousness, the fact is that women are not uniquely equipped to be in two places at once or to do two things at once. It is here that "speed" is a more useful concept: we may persuade ourselves that a woman can do two things at once, or be in two places at once, if only figuratively. But it is much harder to imagine moving at two speeds at once.

The concept of speed rather than doubleness is particularly relevant to the life course approach, which is above all about the passage of, and through, time. And replacing the "double life" approach of feminist theory with a perspective which looks instead at the temporal rhythms of women's lives inevitably gives feminist theory a life course orientation too. But if the life course approach encourages the long view of transitions over the life span, so feminist theorists would want to remember that the life course is traversed one day at a time. The actions of the day, as Giddens also reminds us, build the structures which both enable and constrain us over the long haul.

A useful synthesis of the life course perspective and feminist theory is possible. But this synthesis would be well served by a materialist methodological approach which considers in a particular way what women (and men) actually do with their time, day after day and year after year. The long view of the life course approach offers too few categories for the complexities of many women's lives, but the close-up scrutiny of much feminist research fails to connect "dailiness" to broader social structures. Between the two is a middle-range view which classifies activities of daily life just broadly enough to allow them to be seen as occurring in sequence, not simultaneously. While not disputing women's much-touted ability to perform manual and mental tasks at the same time, activities classified more broadly in fact tend not to happen together. Thus women who work eight hours a day in paid employment are not, for those eight hours, caring for their children, though they will care for their children when they get home from work. Women who care for children full-time for eight hours a day are not, during those eight hours, writing computer programs or running meetings, though they may do both when the children are in bed for the night.

Life course researchers see lives as a synthesis of many different careers, and feminist researchers are particularly sensitive to the difficulties many women have in juggling careers. The materialist approach suggested here presents a view of career synthesis less as strands in a rope than as segments of a mosaic. Piecework, and patchwork, are two other images which are apt, but perhaps not after all surprising, as descriptors of the life course of many women.

Real life and the future of "mothering"

The glimpse, described earlier, of women as social agents, moving freely between so-called public and private domains, sharing their concerns about their children in responsive workplaces, bringing interesting work into their homes, participating in lively and supportive social networks, is a glimpse of real life for some women. But people, as Giddens also reminds us, are not similarly positioned socially, or equally constrained. Only about 28 per cent of 30- to 34-year-old Canadian mothers of preschool children stay home full-time to care for them (Beaujot, 1995). In the same age group, nearly 39 per cent of mothers of preschoolers work part-time -- though not usually in the professional and "family-friendly" part-time work described in this study. And 33 per cent of 30- to 34-year-old mothers of pre-schoolers work full-time in workplaces that are not at all responsive to the needs of children and families. These women, too, are agents, but their actions are differently constrained. And part of what constrains them (as it constrained Laura, Bonnie and Helene, described in Chapter 6) is the persistence of the belief that they too should be primary caregivers to their children. That belief achieves its prominence at least in part because, as noted earlier, it is also held by a group of privileged middle class women who act on it, and in so acting ensure its persistence and its ideological power.

Not all women are able to stay home to care for their children, however much they may wish to do so. But their wishes, and the example of those women who *do* stay home, jointly influence the sort of alternate care they choose. The circle of grandmothers and aunts, of private babysitters and dayhome providers, continues to contain childcare as women's work, and keep its most obvious manifestations out of the workplace. The case can also be made, of course, that grandmothers, aunts and private babysitters are the main source of child care because, in contemporary Canadian society, these are the only sources available. The fact that only 3.2 per cent of Canadian babies under 17 months old were in any kind of licensed day care in 1988 (as were only 28 per cent of preschool children needing child care in 1990) suggests a gap in service provision (Statistics Canada, 1993, 1994).

The power of public policy to affect women's choices has been noted in Chapter 2. Because of parental leave provisions and publicly funded day care, many more Swedish mothers participate in the paid labour force than is the case in other countries. In France, maternity leaves are incorporated into the labour code, and parents of three-year-olds have access to an almost comprehensive system of pre-school education. As Chapter 3 pointed out, the practices of caring for children are constrained by the social context in which they take place. And the social context is in turn constrained by ideologies about what children need and what mothers should do.

In Canada, the availability of high-quality public day care spaces would hugely benefit many working women whose present child care arrangements are unsatisfactory. But while it would relieve some of the burden of worry and guilt, it would not necessarily help shift the gender balance of responsibility for children. Neither would policies which worked in the other direction, supporting parental care of children at home with financial remuneration for homemakers. Since it is hard to see how such remuneration could reach levels that would attract men, support for homemakers would become support for mothers, and would reinvent separate spheres of public and private, "work" and family. As Sorensen (1991), cited in Chapter 3, points out, more equitable gender relations will never be achieved until the link between gender and child care is broken.

A question that must be raised at this point is how well existing programs aimed at workplace equity actually address this link. Employment equity is a case in point. The 1984 Royal Commission on Equality of Employment defines employment equity as a strategy to eliminate the effects of discrimination and to make job opportunities fully available to those who have been historically excluded (Krahn and Lowe, 1993). The 1986 federal Employment Equity Act, for example, seeks to address systemic discrimination which disadvantages four designated groups (women, visible minorities, aboriginal peoples, and the disabled), and sets targets and timetables for achieving a more representative workforce. But programs promoting "equality for all" tend to assume a gender neutrality which does not exist. Opening up to women jobs that were formerly held mainly by men is of course highly desirable in principle. But as some of the women in this study discovered, non-traditional jobs tend to work for women only until they have children: it bears repeating that motherhood constrains women in the workplace. Programs (like those noted in Chapter 2) to help (gender-neutral) workers manage their family responsibilities are actually attempts to help women, if it is mainly women who use them. And "helping" women to manage their family responsibilities serves only to affirm these responsibilities as a woman's problem.

Canada's parental leave program is a broader example of this same dilemma. As Evans and Pupo (1993) point out, amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act in 1990 provided for 10 weeks of parental leave which could be used by either parent to care for a newborn. Evans and Pupo argue that parental leave may potentially make two contributions to improving women's labour force position. First, as "leave" from employment, it offers continued attachment to the labour force. Second, by extending to fathers the formal opportunity to participate in the care of a newborn, it offers the possibility of change in the traditional division of labour in the home. Based on the experience of Sweden, where parental leave has been available since 1974, Evans and Pupo conclude that parental leave is unlikely to change the gendered division of child care. Some fathers may take up parental leave as a way of showing they "care about" their children. But the continued opportunity to "care for" them will require permanent changes in workplaces and families. The Swedish evidence suggests that it will be mainly women who will take up parental leave. And the limitations of the Canadian provisions (low financial benefits and limited job protection) suggest that it will only be better-paid women who can afford to do so. Meanwhile, say Evans and Pupo, the existence of the policy endorses ideological commitment to the private care of infants in their own home.

Pay equity programs, flawed though they are (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1990) would go some way to ensuring that women are not automatically nominated as primary caregivers because of their dramatically lower incomes. But pay equity programs are unlikely to bridge some of the wide earnings gaps found in middle-class families like many of the ones described in this research. In such cases men's careers would continue to be privileged, and child care would continue to be done mainly by women. These men would be even less likely, by virtue of their greater earning power, to take up parental leave and "learn the baby." This research confirms the findings of other studies (LaRossa and LaRossa, 1981) that even when men do care for babies, they babysit, or "help," rather than "mother."

Perhaps workplaces must first be changed in smaller and more subtle ways to make their inhabitants more receptive to the larger policy changes described above. Rossiter (1988), cited in Chapter 3 as noting the obligation for children to be invisible in the workplace, comments that this invisibility is particularly painful for fathers "whose corporate masculinity depends on never being needed by their children." Rossiter claims that we can no longer afford to have invisible children, and we cannot afford to continue in the belief that paid work and children cannot mix. We have to "begin to invent models which show how parents can enter the public sphere *with* their children." A place to start, Rossiter suggests, is for example to "learn not to lie" when we leave work early to take the children to a birthday party. We must "face the discomfort of breaking the public/private split by declaring what we really have to do" because it is "precisely the petty sites that tell us about the larger social order" (Rossiter, 1988: 280-281). Rossiter's specific example is not a good one: the option of "leaving work early" for any reason is not universally available. And far too many women have paid far too big a price for making just such public disclosures about birthday parties and other family-related matters. The point really is that more men need to take responsibility for transportation to the birthday party -- and be willing to tell their workmates about it.

If *men* brought their children to work, even in a figurative sense, then more workplaces might become like the school described above by Barbara, where the teachers spent time discussing their concerns about their children and "bouncing ideas off each other." Bringing children into the workplace would make them visible, and would help to make life for everyone all of (one) piece. Bringing adults -- more adults, male as well as female adults -- into children's lives would have the same effect.

The advantage of bringing children into the workplace is that it makes public the disjunctions of paid work and family work, and the difficulties of combining them. This is exactly what does *not* happen when women try to solve the problem by bringing professional work into their homes. Home-based work keeps the difficulties hidden, or at any rate hidden from men.

Conclusion

The research described in this dissertation has focused on a group of university-educated women now entering their thirties and confronting the transition to motherhood. Using an interpretive approach with data gathered through semi-structured interviews, it has addressed two issues raised by a review of the literature on women's paid work and family responsibilities: the effect of particular employment choices on the timing of the transition to motherhood; and the effect of those employment choices on decisions about paid employment after childbirth. A second goal of the research, informed by feminist theory and the life course perspective, was to critically examine the metaphor of the "double life" in terms of its relevance for the women in the study.

The findings of this study indicate that career choice and work history have contradictory effects on the timing of the transition, though in general, successful establishment of a career -- effected in this study more quickly by education graduates -- is the most important prerequisite. In terms of employment decisions after childbirth, the women in the study collectively epitomized a classic dilemma. Those who chose traditionally female occupations (for example teaching, nursing, speech pathology) were all able to maintain strong links through their childrearing years to the careers for which they had been trained. This connection was greatly facilitated by the fact that in all cases the work converted to part-time when the women's family circumstances made full-time work too onerous.

Those who chose non-traditional occupations (for example, engineering, business) were obliged either to struggle with demanding and generally inflexible full-time work, along with full responsibility for family work, or to withdraw from formal paid employment altogether. The serious question raised by this dilemma is whether non-traditional occupations which do not survive the birth of the first child can be considered advantageous to women in the long run.

The answer is clearly not to confine women to traditional occupations so that they will be able to combine paid work and family responsibilities. But the prospect of women in non-traditional occupations being prevented by the work they do from having children is equally unpalatable. The deeper dilemma is that anything done -- in a structural or policy sense -- to "help" women combine work and family only strengthens the belief that family work is women's responsibility. The major theoretical contribution of this research is to suggest some of the reasons why many well-educated, middle-class women make motherhood a career, and in so doing perpetuate the belief that children are women's work. In fact women can only be "helped" by structural change which will allow men to share equitably in the work of and the responsibility for their families.

Several directions for future research are suggested by the findings reported here. First, the difference in terms of career continuity prospects between traditional and non-traditional occupations, encountered here with a small group of middle-class professional women, should be tested on a much larger sample. Glass's (1990) study is a promising beginning, but future research should avoid the problems of aggregation across many occupational groupings by concentrating on a few, clearly distinguishable ones. Thus for example a comparison of women teachers, nurses and speech pathologists with women engineers, lawyers and geologists -- with close attention to their age, work history and family status -- would be extremely useful. An extension of such a study would be to follow up women employees in as wide a range as possible of large work organizations (for example, municipal governments, city hospitals, oil company head offices) who had taken maternity leave during a given period in the past. Such a study would allow a closer examination of the post-childbirth employment choices of women in a wide range of precisely specified jobs.

A short-term longitudinal study of new parents -- using closely spaced interviews from perhaps the last trimester of pregnancy through the baby's first 18 months -- would add to small-scale pioneering studies such as those of Rossiter (1988). Such a study should focus on the practices of early mothering (in Ruddick's [1983] generic sense -- the development of "maternal thinking") and on the structures which facilitate or impede its development in both parents. Information on the ways in which men surrender and women assume responsibility for child care is critically important. The suggestion from this study -- that the decision to have a child is mainly a woman's decision, and that responsibility for this decision imposes serious obligations in terms of responsibility for the child once born -- could be tested here.

Finally, this study's focus on the mothers of children suggests many ways in which research on the children themselves would be helpful. At a time when there is a dearth of publicly funded, or even formally licensed, child care in Canada, it would be useful to know what constitutes "quality care" from the perspective of the people most involved, namely children. It is also important to address the problem of providing such care without at the same time continuing to relieve fathers of the responsibility for family work. While feminists have long argued that meeting children's needs takes a heavy psychic and material toll on their mothers, the answer is not to meet women's needs at the expense of their children.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE: Women with children

1. Current job/present circumstances.

2. Why did you choose the degree you did?

3. What were your work plans when you graduated?

4. How has your working life unfolded?

5. When you graduated, what were your hopes and plans about relationships and family life? Has all that unfolded the way you thought it would?

6. What stage were you at in your working life when you got married?

7. What stage were you at in your working life when you first became pregnant?

8. Was the pregnancy planned? If so, what made this the right time? (OR, why would you not have planned a baby at this time? OR, health/religious reasons.)

9. What stage was your husband/partner at in his career? How much support were you expecting from him?

10. What about other family members? Women friends?

11. What did you plan to do about work when the baby arrived? Why was that? How did that work out?
[DITTO FOR SUBSEQUENT CHILDREN]

12. What other commitments and responsibilities have you had since you started your family?

13. What about personal time, things you do just for you?

14. How would you describe your particular balance of work and family? What are the advantages of doing things this way? What are the disadvantages? Do you see yourself as having any other options?

15. What are your partner's responsibilities in child care and household work? Who else can you turn to for help and support now? (Are you the primary care-giver in your family?)

15. Looking back, would you do any of it differently?

16. Do you think your choices might have been different if you had chosen a different type of career originally?

17. Do you think your choices might have been different if money were no object/if economic times were different?

18. How important has the work part of your life been? (What does work do for you now?)

19. How would you describe your experience of being a mother? Is that a different experience from that of your own mother?

20. Looking five years down the road, how do you see your work and family life unfolding?

21. If you had three wishes for your life right now, what would they be?

INTERVIEW GUIDE: Women expecting first baby

1. Current job/present circumstances.

2. Why did you choose the degree you did?

3. What were your work plans when you graduated?

4. How has your working life unfolded?

5. When you graduated, what were your hopes and plans about relationships and family life? Has all that unfolded the way you thought it would?

6. What stage were you at in your working life when you got married?

7. What stage were you at in your working life when you became pregnant?

8. Was the pregnancy planned? If so, what made this the right time? (OR, why would you not have planned a baby at this time? OR, health/religious reasons.)

9. What stage is your husband/partner at in his career? How much support are you expecting from him?

10. What about other family members? Women friends?

11. What do you plan to do about work when the baby arrives? (What are your options? Why this choice?)

12. Do you think your choices might be different if you were in a different line of work?

13. Do you think your choices would be different if money were no object/if economic times were different?

14. What other commitments and responsibilities do you have?

15. What about personal time, things you do just for you?

16. How might this change?

17. How important has the work part of your life been?

18. Is there anything up to now that you would have done differently?

20. Looking five years down the road, how do you see your work and family life unfolding?

21. If you had three wishes for your life right now, what would they be?

INTERVIEW GUIDE: Married women, no children

1. Current job/present circumstances.

2. Why did you choose the degree you did?

3. What were your work plans when you graduated?

4. How has your working life unfolded?

5. When you graduated, what were your hopes and plans about relationships and family life? Has all that unfolded the way you thought it would?

6. What stage were you at in your working life when you got married?

7. Are you giving any thought to having a family right now?

8. What are the main issues that you're considering in thinking about having or not having a family?

9. What stage is your husband/partner at in his career? (How much support would you expect from him?/How does he feel about all this?)

10. What about other family members? Women friends?

11. Do you think your choices might be different if you were in a different line of work?

12. Do you think your choices would be different if money were no object/if economic times were different?

13. What other commitments and responsibilities do you have?

14. What about personal time, things you do just for you?

15. How important has the work part of your life been?

16. Is there anything that children might do for you that you couldn't get elsewhere? (Do you have a deadline age?)

17. If the deadline comes, and it seems there might not be children, what do you think would take their place?

18. Is there anything up to now that you would have done differently?

19. Looking five years down the road, how do you see your work and family life unfolding? (Working life with/without children?)

20. If you had three wishes for your life right now, what would they be?

INTERVIEW GUIDE: Single women

1. Current job/present circumstances.

2. Why did you choose the degree you did?

3. What were your work plans when you graduated?

4. How has your working life unfolded?

5. What other commitments and responsibilities do you have?

6. What about personal time, things you do just for you?

7. How important has the work part of your life been?

8. When you graduated, what were your hopes and plans about relationships and family life? Has all that unfolded the way you thought it would?

9. Do you think your circumstances might be different if you were in a different line of work?

10. Would you welcome a significant relationship in your life right now?

11. Would you like to have children some time?

12. Would raising children on your own ever be an option?

13. Is there anything that children might do for you that you couldn't get elsewhere?

14. Do you have a deadline age, after which it would be too late to have children?

15. If the deadline comes, and it seems that there may not be children in your life, what do you think would take their place?

16. How would your working life look, with and without a family?

17. Is there anything up to now that you would have done differently?

18. Looking five years down the road, how do you see your life unfolding?

19. If you had three wishes for your life right now, what would they be?